

THE DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE
ROMANTIC IDEAL

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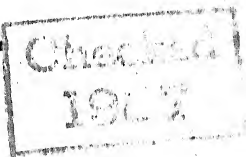
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THE DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE
ROMANTIC IDEAL



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Cambridge*

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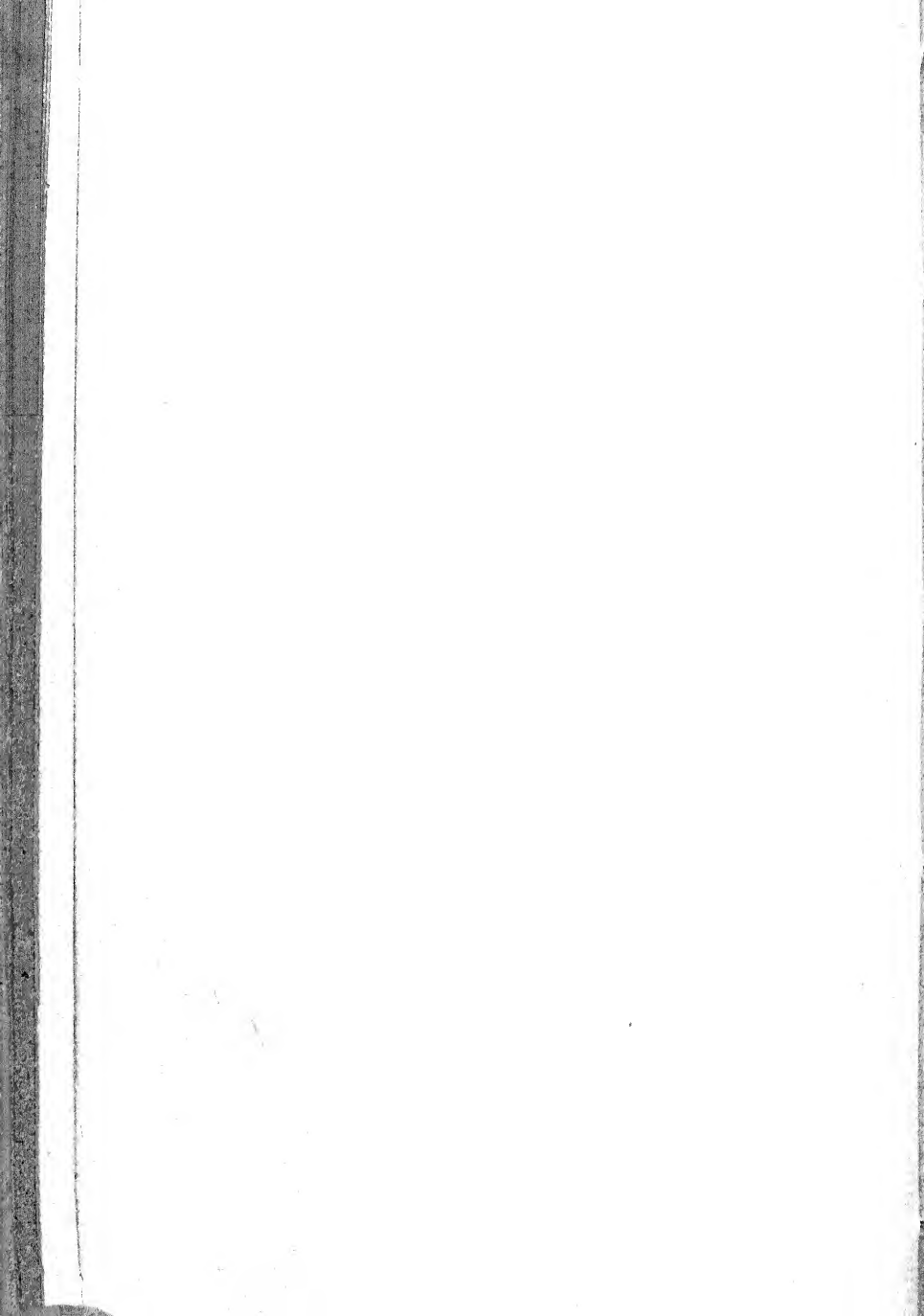
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TO
A ROMANTIC
WHO HAS NOT DECLINED NOR FALLEN,
GORDON BOTTOMLEY

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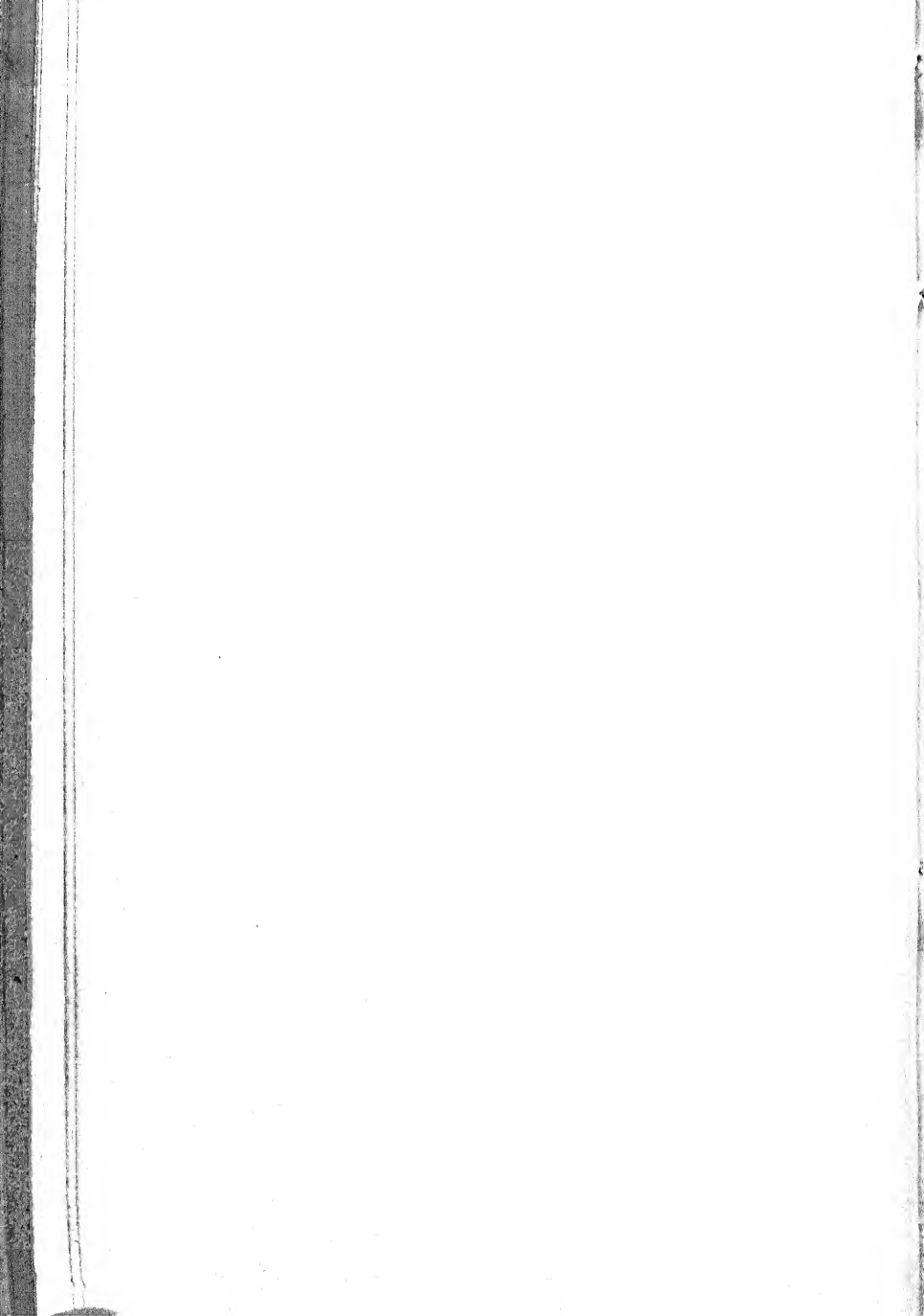
NOTE

AN abridged version of chapters I-III was delivered before the University College of North Wales at Bangor, as the three Ballard Mathews Lectures for 1935; and (in still shorter form) before the Royal Institution, in December of that year. Chapter v is a reprint of the Warton Lecture for 1933 to the British Academy, by whose permission it is republished here. I should like to express my gratitude to all three bodies for a kindness and hospitality that turned the lecturer's task into a pleasure. Chapter vi originally appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* for July-August 1935.

I have added an Epilogue for reviewers and others who may find the book too long.

F. L. L.

August 1936



CHAPTER I

LA PRINCESSE LOINTAINE; OR THE NATURE OF ROMANTICISM

THERE are two stanzas of Heine that all the world has heard:

Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam
Im Norden auf kahler Höh.
Ihn schläfert; mit weisser Decke
Umhüllen ihn Eis und Schnee.

Er träumt von einer Palme,
Die, fern im Morgenland,
Einsam und schweigend trauert
Auf brennender Felsenwand.

On a bare northern hillside
A lonely fir-tree grows,
Nodding in its white mantle
Of ice and driven snows.

And of a palm its dream is
That sorrows, mute, alone,
In some far land of morning
On hills of burning stone.

Many modern critics would say this was a bad poem. A Nazi would say it was a very bad poem. It was written by a Jew; and all poems by Jews are execrable. This criterion has at least the merit of simplicity. Others would say: "It is a Romantic poem; and all Romantic poems are worthless". Or, to turn back to an older judge, more serious though hardly less severe, suppose we called up, like the ghost of another Samuel at Endor, the ghost of Samuel Johnson? The ghost would, I think, have snorted. "What pleasure or instruction are we to derive

from an enormous and disgusting hyperbole that tells us how one vegetable sighs for another vegetable; which, even if vegetables could hear or see, it could never have seen nor heard of; nor coveted, if it had. If the moral be the vanity of human wishes, that moral can but too easily be pointed on our own doorsteps, without transporting us on the wings of absurdity to the snows of Norway or the sands of Palmyra. Better even that poem of Erasmus Darwin on *The Loves of the Plants*, which was produced five years after my death in the Lichfield of my birth; and describes, to those who can read it,

What Beaux and Beauties crowd the gaudy groves
And woo and win their vegetable Loves.
Sweet blooms Genista in the myrtle shade
And *ten* fond brothers woo the haughty maid . . .
Woo'd with long care, Curcuma¹ cold and shy
Meets her fond husband with averted eye:
Four beardless youths the obdurate beauty move
With soft attentions of Platonic love . . .
The freckled Iris owns a fiercer flame,
And *three* unjealous husbands wed the dame;
Cupressus dark disdains his dusky bride,
One dome contains them, but *two* beds divide.

Here there is science at least, if there be but little sense."

And yet, despite the principles of Dr Johnson, Heine's fir and palm have found a lasting place among his laurels; they remain, despite the bonfires of Dr Goebbels, equally evergreen; while Dr Darwin's plants, typical products of the autumn of Classicism, droop ludicrously bedraggled in their polished hothouse. Good or bad, I have quoted Heine's lyric because it seems to me not only an essentially Romantic poem, but also a poem about the essence of Romance.

¹ The Turmeric.

For it is a dream-poem. Its melody soothes asleep the Argus-eyes of common sense; unless, like Johnson, we rigidly maintain the vigilance of some Classic dragon, guarding the sacred fruit of Reason; of some Roman sentry sternly wakeful at the gates of Fact. And, again, it is a poem about a dream; about the bitter-sweetness of all passionate yearning for things so remote that only in dream can they be ours. It utters the dumb cry of all hands stretched out for that fairy gold on which the rainbow stands—symbol, for the Bible, of God's eternal promise; but for the Romantic, of Man's eternal unfulfilment. Fantastic as Heine's poem seems, it yet embodies impulses real enough to have played no humble part in bringing Alaric to the gates of Rome, the Crusaders to Antioch and Ascalon, Columbus to Hispaniola.

But what remains to-day the worth of this Romanticism, on which the modern wise gaze so coldly askance; though the modern multitude scrambles after its magic pipings as feverishly as ever, through picture-palace and circulating library? This is the question on which I have rashly set out to try to say something new—shall we still allow fir-trees to dream? Or does that simply send us to sleep? Do we belong too much, for better or worse, to an age not of fir-trees but of steel girders? Or can even girders learn to dream?—even ferro-concrete be transmuted to the fabric of fantasy?

"The worst of romances is", said Oscar Wilde, "that they leave one so unromantic." In the same way the reader who gnaws his way through the 11,396 books on Romanticism, begins to feel cured of Romance for life. And that, I think (though so many now think otherwise), is a pity. Why, then, try to write still more

about it? Why add to the dustheap? "There is no new thing under the sun"—that dismal judgement of Solomon must indeed haunt us as we peer into the vast bibliographies of such a subject. And it will haunt our children still worse, our grandchildren worse still; unless libraries are abolished by international agreement or—as seems more likely—by international disagreement.

And yet it is foolish to be afraid of the thin elbowings of the dead. When Solomon cried that there was no new thing, he was forgetting himself. *He* was new. Like everyone else before or since, he was unlike everyone else before or since. Facts are facts, the past is past—we cannot change them. Yet in another sense we are perpetually changing them. What we call "the World" is a compound of the unknown It and our novel and unique selves. In the Sciences, men's impressions are so similar that they can be treated as identical. There knowledge accumulates; progress becomes possible. But in the Arts, and even in the Art of Criticism, we must still walk our own ways to the end. Tradition helps; but, when all is said, we can sing, we can taste, with no tongues but our own. Each new generation, each new life creates a new universe.

And so I am daring to add yet another to those 11,396 discussions of Romanticism. But I shall deal only briefly with older theories; and I shall not feel all is lost, if my readers harden their heads against the new theory that I offer now.

"For God's sake disagree with me," cried Cicero's young friend to the obsequious country-cousin at lunch with him, "so that there can be two of us." So now, if the reader does not agree with me about Romanticism,

still he may find how to agree better with himself. For no one discovers what he really thinks, till he has crossed thoughts with others. So much criticism becomes charlatanism only because the critic wants to say, not his word, but the last word. The only way to be scientific about Art is to recognize that we cannot yet be scientific about Art. We know too little psychology. Even of Science Montesquieu has well said that "observations are its facts, theories its fairy-tales". If this theory proves only one more fairy-tale, I hope some of its examples and illustrations may yet be interesting in and for themselves.

"There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters"—so writes one modern critic, with that trenchant decisiveness not uncommon in men of the pen; at least on paper. "There is no place in letters", that is, for Coleridge or Scott, Keats or Emily Brontë, Hugo or Heine? But, it will be said, this is mad. What possible purpose can be served by such oracular dogmatism? The purpose of amassing a reputation. Men are easily brow-beaten about Art. Accordingly our criticism flourishes on a brazen standard. And yet how comes such a statement to be made in the country of Coleridge and Keats? Because it had already been made in the country of Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset. But is it any saner to say it in France? Hardly. But more intelligible. For behind it rankle the long embitterments of French politics.

"Le Romantisme, c'est la Révolution"—"le Romanisme, c'est Rousseau." Rousseau's work, we are told, "exhale une odeur de cadavre". From him came "cette corruption intégrale des hautes parties de la nature

humaine"—"la pourriture *romantique* de l'intelligence".¹ Those who have heard the tone with which this last endearment, "pourriture", can be bandied between two Parisian taxi-drivers in the throes of collision, will feel that the very last word has been said.

Romanticism is, in fact, to be identified with Liberalism. "Chateaubriand", says M. Charles Maurras, "was all his life a liberal or—what comes to the same thing—an anarchist." This is at least a new view of Chateaubriand, of liberalism, and of anarchy. The wonder does not diminish as we ask ourselves what were the "anarchist" tendencies in Alfred de Vigny; or in Scott, that devoted Tory who so religiously treasured (till unfortunately he sat down on it) the very wineglass from which Majesty had drunk; or try to picture Newman or Christina Rossetti waving red flags, Disraeli or Walter Pater leading the legions of Limehouse to storm St Stephen's. No doubt rebellion in art and rebellion in politics often have gone hand in hand; but far from always. Life is less simple. A principle of compensation may come into play; it would be easy to name modern journals which uphold both the right in politics and the left in literature. "See," they seem to say, "we are not afraid of innovation—in the right place." Actually, the French Revolution found its spiritual home largely in the republics of classic Greece and Rome, among the men of Plutarch. Its painter, David, loathed the mediæval. The Classicism of the Empire speaks for itself. Even after Waterloo it was the Romantic leaders who were legitimist and Catholic. Similarly, German Roman-

¹ See Maurice Souriau's interesting *Hist. du Romantisme en France*, pp. xxvii-xxxvi.

ticism brought miraculous draughts of converts to the nets of Rome. Even in modern Germany the Nazi movement shows a strong "Romantic" tinge with its homesick hankerings to revert to the noble pagan, to Nature and the soil, to "thinking with the blood"—all the queer nostrums it shares with that modern Rousseau, D. H. Lawrence. So that to blame Romanticism for the sins of the Revolution seems a little like proclaiming, because Marx admired Shakespeare and Moscow performs him, that the Prince of Denmark was a disguised Bolshevik and King Lear the ancestor of Lenin.

Such fantasies are possible, partly because human beings will believe anything in the heat of controversy; but partly also because critics still tend to ignore other literatures than their own. English critics to-day still make glib generalizations about "poetry", which they would see to be absurd had they thought for two minutes about the poetry of other countries. Similarly, French critics can treat "the Romantics" in general as public poisoners, because in France, with French logic and French fire, men and women did try far more to live as well as write "Romantically"; often with disastrous results that have had few counterparts on our colder side of the Channel. It is enough to set Tennyson with his almost Philistine healthiness, his growls about "poisonous honey brought from France", beside Alfred de Musset; or Browning beside Victor Hugo; or George Eliot beside George Sand; or Meredith beside Flaubert. Think, again, of the Young England movement beside *les Jeune-France*—of all our muscular Christians, muscular deists, muscular agnostics, whose robustness Taine admired as might some explorer coming suddenly in

a jungle-clearing upon a herd of moon-lit elephants. But in France, Flaubert and the Goncourts looked askance at Taine with his outlandish notions of healthiness in art: they were half convinced that to be an artist one must be sick, as whales to produce ambergris.¹ Naturally two countries so different bred very different forms of Romanticism.

Thus the French intelligence, after its wont, reasoned out far clearer theories of the Romantic; French consistency carried them to wilder extremes in practice; and, in the reaction that naturally followed, the French intelligence has evolved still more theories of the universal disastrousness of Romanticism. These are, I think, partly true of Romanticism in France; but they are very imperfectly true of Romanticism in general. In England they often fail to apply at all.

There is the further trouble that the word "Romanticism" has turned from a historical label into a war-cry. No one knows quite what it does mean. And it is clear that "Classicism" has suffered the same fate, when modern poets who cultivate, however successfully, the Romantic incoherence of an opium dream, the rhythms of the music-hall, and the vocabulary of the slum—all the things that would have jarred to frenzy Pope, Johnson, or Boileau—proudly profess and call themselves "Classical".

¹ Cf. Michelet's remark when Flaubert is suffering from boils—"Qu'il ne se soigne pas, il n'aurait plus son talent". The Goncourts had the same crotchet about themselves. Cf. too J. Renard, *Journal*, 1 August 1898: "L'esprit vit aux dépens du corps; si tu te portes bien, tu penseras mal." It would surely be truer to say: "You will have fewer fantasies." It is simply a question of whether one prefers auto-intoxicated dreaming or the clear-headedness of health.

What in fact is "Romanticism"? What, historically, has it been? What can or should it be?

What is it? It will be well to begin with a few of the answers of past critics; together with antidotes in the style of Diogenes. The story is well known. Plato had defined man as "a featherless biped"; Diogenes promptly paraded the streets of Athens displaying a plucked fowl to the world as "Plato's man". Diogenes may not have been a very good philosopher; he is very good indeed for philosophers.

"Romanticism", said Goethe, "is disease; Classicism is health." And again—"the point is for a work to be thoroughly good and then it is sure to be Classical". So the author of *Werther* cuts the knot, leaving us only loose ends. For, after all, is *The Ancient Mariner* really "diseased"? Is *Faust* not "Romantic"?

Stendhal cuts the knot as trenchantly; but in a different direction. For him Romanticism is, at any time, the art of the day; Classicism, the art of the day before. In fact, all good art is first Romantic, then becomes Classical. And yet, does anyone, even after a century, think of *The Ancient Mariner* as Classical? Or *The Lady of Shalott*? We may call them "classics", meaning "established masterpieces". But that is another story. To use "Romantic" as a mere synonym for "up-to-date" does not leave us wiser; it merely leaves the language poorer.

The Dictionary of the French Academy in 1835 and some later critics have preferred to treat "Romanticism" as a matter simply of technique—a mere kicking against the pricks of Classicism, as governed by the Rules, say, of Boileau. But this seems too negative. Zola, or many

a modern writer who detests Romanticism, would have been no less detested by Boileau. Romanticism cannot be made merely the opposite of Classicism; because Classicism has, I think, more opposites than one.

Victor Hugo in his famous preface to *Cromwell* preferred to associate Romanticism above all with "the grotesque". Christianity, he argues, with its sense of sin brought melancholy into the world (surely one of the strangest assertions ever made). Man now realized the paradox of his imperfect nature—

Magnificent out of the dust we came,
And abject from the spheres.¹

With this melancholy grew up the sense of "the grotesque"—whether horrible, or ludicrous, or both (like Hugo's own Hunchback); and hence arose that habit of mingling the grotesque with the tragic or sublime, which Classicism forbids, but life confirms. Thus, after signing Charles I's death-warrant, Cromwell and another of the regicides are said to have bespattered each other's faces with the ink. Romanticism is therefore really Truthfulness (*la vérité*).

Yet what, we may ask, is "grotesque" in Wordsworth's *Highland Maid* or in Keats's *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, in Musset's *Nuits* or Yeats's *Inisfree*?

Later Hugo was content to define Romanticism more vaguely, as "liberalism in literature"; or merely as a "mot de guerre".

For Heine, Romanticism was "the reawakening of the Middle Ages... a passion-flower blooming from the blood of Christ"; Sismondi, too, has defined it by its themes, as a mixture of love, religion and chivalry. And

¹ William Watson.

yet there is nothing mediaeval in *Werther* or *Wuthering Heights*;¹ little religion in Byron or Morris; little love in *Kubla Khan*. It remains, I think, as hard to define Romanticism by its subjects or its sympathies, as by its style and technique.

Others have approached Romanticism by its emotional temper. To Brunetière, in so far as it was more than a mere reaction from Classicism, it seemed a blind wave of literary egotism. It must be admitted that many Romantics were extravagantly self-centred. Lord Chesterfield would have considered that Chateaubriand or Byron, as writers, had no manners. But is *The Ancient Mariner*, that invaluable example, egotistic?—is it not, on the contrary, a sermon against egotism? What of Scott? What of Keats, with his opposite theory that the true poet is, like Shakespeare, a selfless sympathy inhabiting the shoes and the very skins of others; entering the heart now of Imogen, now of a sparrow, now of Iago, now of a billiard-ball?

“Emotion against Reason”—so runs another of the most time-worn formulas for the Romantic Revolt. George Sand has written: “Everything excessive is poetic”. And Léon Daudet, with his usual restraint, has described Romanticism in general as “une espèce de codification du dérèglement . . . une béatification de l’impulsivité”. Yet the heroine of *The Heart of Midlothian* is a stoic who refuses to perjure herself even to save a sister’s life; and Scott’s own *Journal* remains a monument of sanity and honesty, courage, and self-control. The whole life of Christina Rossetti was a tragedy of morbid

¹ Heine’s view is admirably dealt with and answered in Professor Grierson’s Leslie Stephen lecture for 1923—*Classical and Romantic*.

self-repression. Nor was eighteenth-century Classicism so unemotional: think of Swift dying "like a poisoned rat in its hole"; of Voltaire, of whom it has been well said that we might as well call white-hot iron "cold", because it is not red. He could not even understand, he cried, how people *could* be cold. He found too frigid the acting of Mlle Dumesnil. "Il faudrait avoir le diable au corps", she complained, "pour arriver au ton que vous me voulez faire prendre." "Eh vraiment, oui, c'est le diable au corps qu'il faut avoir *pour exceller dans tous les arts*." Think, too, of Johnson, so much more emotional than most of us, that in boyhood *Hamlet* made him afraid to go to bed and even in manhood he could not face the end of *Lear*. And what of the passion of the "Classical" *Phèdre*, the horrors of the "Classical" *Oedipus*?

Others have concentrated on the general atmosphere of Romantic works. For Pater Romanticism was the addition of "strangeness" to beauty; yet it has often aimed not at beauty at all, but quite other things, such as the terrible or the grotesque. For Watts-Dunton it was "the Renaissance of Wonder", after "the periwig poetry" of the eighteenth century; for others it is "mystery" or "aspiration". Romantic literature, they might say, is Wonderland; whereas Classic literature is a Looking-glass world, coldly reflecting reality in its gilded Queen Anne frame. And yet there is surely little "mystery", ever, in Byron or Swinburne, in Burns or Musset; often, there is little "aspiration".

Professor Abercrombie has transferred the conflict to a fresh front. For him Romanticism is the opposite, not of Classicism, but of Realism. Shakespeare he finds as "Classical" as Sophocles, except in the early phase of

Richard II and *Romeo and Juliet*. By "Realism", however, Professor Abercrombie means, not the literary creed of a Zola, but "the habit of mind" of a Bentham. "Romanticism is a withdrawal from outer experience to concentrate on inner experience"—as in Blake, or Shelley, or "cubist painting".

There is far more truth, I think, in this view; but it seems to me both to exaggerate and to omit. Hugo, it will be recalled, justified Romanticism as, on the contrary, a return to reality; because real life perpetually mingles hornpipes and funerals to compose its ironic "Satires of Circumstance". It was Classicism that cried out against the crudity of even naming so low an animal as a dog or so vulgar an object as Desdemona's handkerchief. "Enlevez-moi ces magots!" exclaimed Louis XIV, on being shown some realistic Dutch pictures. Similarly Schiller, adapting in Classic mood the Romantic pages of *Macbeth*, felt it necessary to replace the raw conversation of the Porter by a morning hymn about sky-larks.

What, again, could be more realistic than the low life in Scott's romances, or the carpets rising along the gusty floor in *The Eve of St Agnes*? Morris thought nothing of a mediaevalist who could not draw offhand a knight in armour with his feet on the hob, toasting a herring on his sword-point; and in his work who has not seen and felt, so vivid are they, the grey ears of Lancelot's horse twitching on the dusty downs by Glastonbury, the beads of melted snow-water on the steel shoes of Sir Galahad, the mud and rain and cold and hopelessness of that sodden Haystack in the Floods? Similarly with the minute realism of Pre-Raphaelite painting. It was, in fact, this love of the Romantics for realistic *décor* and setting,

furniture and local colour, that provided one source of Naturalism in the later novel. They grasped the importance of environment, the power of material adjuncts over the soul. The rustics of Scott and Sand look forward to the rustics of Hardy and Maupassant; the Paris of Hugo to the Paris of Balzac. So far is there from being an impassable gulf between Romance and Realism that Charlotte's homely bread-and-butter has stuck for ever to the Romantic sleeve of Werther; and Wordsworth, having launched his Highland Boy first of all, only too realistically, in

A Household Tub, like one of those,
Which women use to wash their clothes,

was yet ready to trans-ship him, at Coleridge's persuasion, to a Romantic turtle-shell—

A shell of ample size, and light
As the pearly ear of Amphitrite,
That sportive dolphins drew.

The Romantic is in fact ready to swallow the most realistic herring, provided it is on the point of a sword—or merely to annoy the Classicist who thinks it "low". "All very well," said Lockhart of Mr Pickwick, "but damned low"; Dickens, like Browning, shows how easy it is to alternate between Realism and Romance. It was Classicism that found itself accused at the Romantic Revival of never "having its eye on the object". Similarly with a writer like Flaubert it is hard to say whether he is more romantic or realistic. His *Salammbô* was archaeologically minute to the point of pedantry. Yet he not only created Emma Bovary; he was himself Emma Bovary, a romantic dreamer. He enjoyed the paradoxes

of his own double nature. He loved to contemplate the stars in puddles. The contrasts of the Orient fascinated him—its perfumes and its vermin, the silver bracelet on the ulcered arm, the plague-stricken corpses among the golden oranges of Jaffa. “Tu me dis que les punaises de Ruchiouk-Hânem” (a famous Egyptian courtesan) “te la dégradent; c’est là, moi, ce qui m’enchantait. Leur odeur nauséabonde se mêlait au parfum de sa peau ruisselante de santal.” It is quite understandable. The Romantic pursues violent feelings; and, like an Elizabethan dramatist, he may find them in the crudities of reality as well as in the fantasies of dream. Indeed, dreams themselves can be at times only too realistic.

In short, the learned are no nearer agreement now than when Alfred de Musset made comedy of the whole controversy in the first of those *Lettres de Dupuis et Cotonet* which are too little known in England. Dupuis and Cotonet, two good provincials of La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre and surely next-of-kin to Flaubert’s Bouvard and Pécuchet, write to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* the sad story of their quest—what is Romanticism? At first they thought it meant breaking the Unities; then, after Hugo’s *Cromwell*, that it was the wedding of sublime and grotesque; then that it meant imitating foreigners and importing gnomes, ghouls, vampires, ogres and mandrakes from Germany, melancholia from England, tempestuous passions from Andalusia and Castile; then that it meant playing ducks and drakes with the rules of French prosody; then that it was “le genre historique”—novels about François I and the like; then that it was “le genre intime”—whatever that might mean; then that it was a system of political economy; then that it

meant going about unshaven in a flamboyant waistcoat. In vain they consulted lawyers' clerks and local magistrates; these only added to their confusion. Until at last Cotonet discovered the whole simple truth; Romanticism consists in stringing round the neck of every noun at least half a dozen epithets. In this year 1936 Dupuis and Cotonet celebrate their centenary; but their old age remains as green as their ingenuous youth.¹

Clearly the first thing is to dig back to the roots. What is the origin of these two quarrelsome words, "Classic" and "Romantic"? The point has often been discussed but it cannot be neglected; and there are certain details that have not, I think, been fully brought out.

As the Roman Empire was flooded by the barbarians, beside official Latin—*lingua Latina*—there grew up a barbarized vernacular called, by the eighth century, "*lingua Romanica*". From its adverb *Romanice* (*loqui* or *scribere*) comes the noun "Romance"; applied first to

¹ No doubt, just as MM. Maurras and Daudet have explained Romanticism by politics, other Dupuis and Cotonets of the future will arise to explain it, Marxianly, by economics. They will not be deterred by the reflection that the great Romantics included all sorts and conditions of men—Rousseau and Chateaubriand, Vigny and Stendhal, Walpole and Chatterton, Burns and Byron, Keats and Shelley, Swinburne and Meredith. But I doubt if we can say much more than that the passing of power from upper to middle class and the spread of education did certainly affect the public for which writers wrote, and thereby what they wrote. Aristocracies tend more to sacrifice feeling to *les bienséances*, the *bourgeoisie* to think more of morals but less of manners, more of the heart and less of "that repose Which marks the caste of Vere de Vere". This doubtless helped the emotionalism of nineteenth-century literature to break down the rigid traditions of the eighteenth; just as the vast further extension of the reading public may account for some of the literary vulgarity of the twentieth. And of course the emotional effect of the French Revolution is a commonplace. But Romanticism remains, I think, essentially a problem, not of politics or economics, but of psychology.

old French (*romanz*), then to Provençal (*roumanço*) and Spanish (*romance*); later still to the other Latin tongues. Again, from meaning the French vernacular the word came to denote also the kind of literature composed in that vernacular—that is, fictitious stories in verse or, later, prose. In the seventeenth century appears a new development. From its fictitious nature “romance” comes, like “fable”, to mean any fantastic statement. And “romantic” now signifies either “false as a fairy-tale”, or “strange and dream-like as a fairy-tale”.¹ It is easy to find similar developments in words like “tragic”, “comic”, “dramatic”, “melodramatic”, “dithyrambic”, “quixotic”. “These things”, writes Pepys, “are almost romantique, and yet true”; and his brother-diarist, Evelyn: “There is also, on the side of this horrid alp, a very romantic seat”. The first recorded appearances of this whole family of usages in the *Oxford Dictionary* group themselves with surprising neatness round the middle of the seventeenth century—“a romance”, as a lying tale, 1638: “romance”, as an adjective, 1653-4 (“Can there be a romancer story than ours?” writes Dorothy Osborne); “romancial”, 1653; “romancical”, 1656; “romancy”, 1654; “romantic”, meaning “fictitious”, 1659; “romantical”, 1678; “romanticly”, 1681 (“romantickly or fabulously”); “romantically”, 1687; “romancer”, meaning “liar”, 1663; “to romance”, 1671. This sudden flowering of new

¹ The similar growth of “romanesque” in French is illustrated by the comments of “Madame”, the Duchess of Orleans, on Villars in her letters to the Electress of Hanover (ed. E. Bodemann, 1891): “Alle des Marechal de Villars maniren seindt *romanesque*” (May 30, 1706); “V. fehlt nicht von verstandt undt hatt grosz courage, aber...ist recht wie ein lebendiger roman” (July 28, 1707).

and somewhat uncomplimentary terms was probably helped by the popular romances of Mlle de Scudéry and her kind on the one hand and, on the other, by the growing reaction from things fantastic in favour of "reason". In the eighteenth century the better sense, "strange as a romance", gradually tends to prevail. The word attaches itself to Gothic ruins, wild landscapes, and other delightful mixtures of terror and sublimity, such as banditti.

Its literary sense—as opposed, like "Gothic", to "Classical"—appears in T. Warton (1781) and Hurd.¹ But it was the Germans, with their love of abstract discussion, who developed the contrast. Goethe claims that he and Schiller first set this apple of discord rolling. Schiller calls his *Jungfrau von Orleans* "eine romantische Tragödie" (1802); A. W. von Schlegel uses the term in his lectures (1801-4), followed by Madame de Staël in her *De l'Allemagne* (1810). It can be appropriately applied, argues Schlegel, to work of *mediaeval* inspiration by contrast with what is "Classical", in the same way as "Romance", the language evolved by the barbarian invaders, is opposed to the classical Latin of the Empire.

Such, then, is the word's pedigree. "Romance" means first a certain language; then a certain type of literature composed in that language; then the epithet "romantic" is applied to the unreality associated with that type of literature; or to the temperament associated

¹ I am indebted for these two references to Logan Pearsall Smith, *Four Words* (S.P.E. Tract No. xvii). Warton speaks of Dante's "wonderful compound of classical and romantic fancy" (*Hist. of Eng. Poetry* (1781), III, 241).

with that type of unreality; or to the literary forms associated with that type of temperament.

"Classical" is a gentleman of more ancient descent. In Latin *classis* (perhaps from the same root as "call") meant originally "a host", military as well as naval. Good King Tullius divided his citizens into five grades, according to the arms they could afford. The richest, providing the cavalry and the heavy-armed phalanx (*classis*), were called *classici*; the rest were *infra classem*. But *classicus* is not transferred metaphorically to writers until, seven centuries later, under the Empire, Aulus Gellius contrasts *classicus scriptor* with *proletarius*—"a first-class, standard writer" with "one of the rabble". At the Renaissance the fact that the "standard" writers of Greece and Rome were read *in class* at school seems to have helped by confusion to produce that other sense of "classic", as applied to any Greek or Roman writer, whether first-class or not. Thus "classical", meaning "standard", dates, in the *Oxford Dictionary*, from 1599 ("Classicall and Canonicall"); meaning "Greek or Latin", from 1607 ("classicall Authors"). Thence the epithet adapted itself to anything supposed to conform to the standards of classical antiquity.

Still, what a word meant once upon a time, though illuminating, is no proof of what it means now (though critics have too often forgotten this and argued, for example, in the teeth of common usage, that because *poiesis* in Greek means any "creative literature" in verse or prose alike, "poetry" in English need not be in metre). As we have seen, "Romanticism" is a perfect Proteus for eluding all our nets of definition. But it is not so much its logical definition, as its psychological basis that really

matters: it is more informative to study an elephant in the flesh than to labour overlong at defining it.

The term "Romantic" has to-day two main usages; first, as applied in a historic sense to the movement which called itself "Romantic"; secondly, to describe other things which give us the same sort of feeling as, say, *La Belle Dame sans Merci* or *The Ancient Mariner* or *Atala* or Hugo's song of Gastibelza. This more general sense is, of course, really older and based originally on the romances of the seventeenth century. But they are now forgotten. It is the masterpieces of the Romantic Revival that have inevitably moulded our modern standards of what is "romantic". The French, indeed, have two words: "romantique" for the movement; "romanesque" for the feeling.¹ But the essential question remains what, if any, are the common qualities of the mental states in which we are moved to make the noise—"How romantic!"

It is worth trying first what sort of examples the word spontaneously calls to memory. A little free association will help.

The Lady of the Lake
Sole-sitting by the shores of old Romance.

"Forlorn"—the very word is like a bell.

The foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
Antres vast and deserts idle.

And airy tongues, that syllable men's names
On Sands and Shoars and desert Wildernesses.

I have tried to preserve this not unserviceable distinction by using "Romantic" with a capital in speaking of the movement, as the equivalent of "romantique"; and "romantic" in the general sense, corresponding to "romanesque".

"On dirait des silences qui succèdent à des silences."¹
 "J'ai jeté mon anneau dans les forêts."² "The owl for all
 his feathers was a-cold." "The sedge is withered from
 the lake."

La Belle Dame sans Merci
 Hath thee in thrall.

A casement open to the night
 To let the warm love in.

"Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante." "Où sont
 les neiges d'antan?" "Sunt apud infernos tot milia
 formosarum."³ The ghost of Elsinore. "Or woman
 wailing for her demon lover." Bürger's *Lenore*. *North-
 anger Abbey*. *Wuthering Heights* (with the young Hareton
 hanging a litter of puppies on a chair-back to pass a
 happy afternoon).

The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,
 And sported his eyes and his temples about.⁴

Son cœur, les bêtes l'ont mangé,
 Qu'en reste-t-il pour sa donzelle?
 Rien qu'un amas en vers changé,
 Rien qu'un paquet de vermicelle.⁵

The day doth daw, the cock doth crawl,
 The channerin' worm doth chide.

Hic tibi mortis erant metæ, domus alta sub Ida,
 Lyrnesi domus alta, solo Laurente sepulchrum.⁶

"And Branwen looked towards Ireland, and towards
 the Isle of the Mighty, to see if she could descry them.
 'Alas,' said she, 'that ever I was born; two islands have

¹ Chateaubriand.

² Ducis (alluding to the Doge's wedding with the sea).

³ Propertius.

⁴ "Monk" Lewis, *Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene*.

⁵ Verhaeren.

⁶ Virgil.

been destroyed because of me.' Then she gave a great groan and there broke her heart. And they made her a four-sided grave and buried her on the banks of the Alaw."¹

αἰ δ' ἄνὰ νύκτα καὶ ἡῶ
ἔξ ἄλως ἠνεμοέντος ἐπιβρέμει οὔασιν ἡχώ.²

"Es war ein König in Thule."³ "Les violons vibrant derrière les collines."⁴

Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.⁵

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door.⁶

Still eyes look coldly upon me,
Cold voices whisper and say:
"He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia,
They have stolen his wits away."⁷

A chain hangs down with golden fetters
From a green oak-tree, in a bay,
And on that chain a cat of letters
Walks round for ever, night and day;
Goes singing, as she rightward ambles;
Turns leftward, and a tale relates.
Strange things are there: the wood-sprite rambles;
The water-maid in branches waits;
And there, on paths unnoted, thickens
The slot of beasts to man unknown;
A cottage there on legs of chickens,
Unwindowed, doorless, stands alone.⁸

¹ *The Mabinogion.*

² Musaeus, *Hero and Leander.*

³ Goethe.

⁴ Baudelaire.

⁵ Hugo.

⁶ Walter de la Mare, *The Listeners* (it should be remembered—I have it on the poet's authority—that the Traveller is himself the ghost).

⁷ Walter de la Mare.

⁸ Pushkin (transl. O. Elton): an almost surrealist passage.

Our only Gods shall be the Subterrane
 Pictures of things mis-shapen, harsh, and crude,
 The flattened Face outside the window-pane,
 The little Squeak behind us in the wood.
 Here, friend, are subtly drawn uncommon things;
 Make such your Gods; they only understand.
 Only a Headless Ape with slimy wings
 Can whisk you round the Interesting Land.¹

With an host of furious fancies
 Whereof I am commander,
 With a burning speare, and a horse of aire,
 To the wilderness I wander.
 By a knight of ghostes and shadowes
 I summon'd am to tourney
 Ten leagues beyond the wide world's end.
 Mee thinkes it is noe journey.²

The town of Brass in the *Arabian Nights*. The ruins of Frankish Mistra, above the ancient Lacedaemon, which inspired a scene in the Second Part of *Faust*.

Far in the town of Sarras
 Red-rose the gloamings fall,
 For in her heart of wonder
 Flames the Sangreal.
 The gleaming fosses ring her,
 Haut dreams her turrets are,
 She riseth o'er the desert,
 Like the great Magian star.³

"The back-tolled bells of noisy Camelot."⁴ "After these years the flowers forget their blood."⁴ The words of the Earl of Derby (later Henry IV) above the dying Sir William Ramsay: "Ah, it is a goodly sight to see a Knight make his shrift in his helmet. God send me such

¹ Flecker (an example of Hugo's "grotesque").

² *Tom o' Bedlam*.

³ Rachel Annand Taylor.

⁴ Morris.

an ending!" Sir John Mandeville's "Watching of the Falcon". The Venus of Botticelli.

C'est chose bien commune
De soupirer pour une
Blonde, chataïne, ou brune
Maîtresse,
Lorsque brune, chataïne,
Ou blonde, on l'a sans peine—
Moi, j'aime la lointaine
Princesse.¹

"It is an odd jealousy; but the poet finds himself not near enough to his object. The pine-tree, the river, the bank of flowers before him, does not seem to be nature. Nature is still elsewhere. This or this is but outskirts and far-off reflection and echo of the triumph that has passed by and is now at its glancing splendour and heyday, perchance in the neighbouring fields, or, if you stand in the field, then in the adjacent woods. The present object shall give you this sense of stillness that follows a pageant that has just gone by. What splendid distance, what recesses of ineffable pomp and loveliness in the sunset! But who can go where they are, or lay his hand or plant his foot thereon? Off they fall from the round world for ever and for ever."²

"Toutes les femmes qu'il a eues n'ont jamais été que les matelas d'une autre femme rêvée."³

Such are some of the spirits, fair or grotesque, called up for me by the word "Romance"—some of the things for which, we are told, "there is no place in literature". What are the qualities that recur? Remoteness, the sad delight of desolation, silence and the supernatural, winter and dreariness; vampirine love and stolen trysts,

¹ Rostand.

² Emerson.

³ *Journal* of the Goncourts (a confession of Flaubert's); note again the combination of Realism with Romance in the phrasing.

the flowering of passion and the death of beauty; Radcliffe horrors and sadistic cruelty, disillusion, death, and madness; the Holy Grail and battles on the Border; the love of the impossible. Before looking for the essential common factor of this strange miscellany it will be as well to repeat the experiment with the terms "Classicism", "Classical". What do they in their turn call to mind?¹

The Parthenon. The tomb-reliefs of the Ceramicus. The grave Roman faces of the Ara Pacis. "The Dorian mood of flutes and soft recorders." The Regulus of Horace, going as calmly to death by torture at Carthage as to a week-end in the country—

Tendens Venafranos in agros
Aut Lacedaemonium Tarentum.

The epitaph of Simonides on the Spartans at Thermopylae. The Delphic "Μηδὲν ἄγαν". The epitaph of the Roman Claudia:

This is the loveless tomb of one once lovely.
Comely her speech was, graceful was her going.
She kept house; spun her wool. 'Tis all. Farewell.

Horace's:

Aequam memento rebus in arduis
Servare mentem.

Denham's Thames:

Though deep, yet clear: though gentle, yet not dull:
Strong, without rage: without o'erflowing, full.

¹ This multiplication of examples may seem long: but the fatal weakness of critical discussions like that between Wordsworth and Coleridge on "Poetic Diction" is their failure to give examples enough; with the result that neither disputant really knows what he means.

The flower-like simplicity of André Chénier's—

Elle a vécu, Myrto, la jeune Tarentine,
Que son vaisseau portait aux bords de Camarine.

The death of Odysseus' last companions, lost at sea—
“and God took from them the day of their home-coming”.

“It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and to the mind, English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright without being oppressive.”¹

“Ne rien outrer, ne rien affecter, plutôt rester un peu en deçà, ne point trop accuser la ligne ni le ton, voilà de quoi nous avons besoin d'être avertis.” (As contrasted with—“tout ce qui force le ton, tout ce qui jure et crie, dans la couleur, dans le style, dans la pensée, dans l'observation et la description des objets extérieurs, dans les découvertes et les analyses à perte de vue qu'on prétend donner de la nature humaine, qui en déplacent violemment le centre, qui en bouleversent l'équilibre.”)²

Heraclitus' “Dry light is best.” The inscription in Madame Geoffrin's *salon*, “rien en relief”.

Truth sits upon the lips of dying men,
And falsehood, while I lived, was far from mine.³

To see life steadily and see it whole.⁴

J'ai senti son beau corps tout froid entre mes bras.⁵

Belle sans ornement, dans le simple appareil
D'une beauté qu'on vient d'arracher au sommeil.⁵

¹ Jane Austen.

² Sainte-Beuve, *Étude sur Virgile*. Cf. his *Térence* in *Nouveaux Lundis*, v.

³ Arnold, *Sohrab and Rustum*.

⁴ Arnold, on Sophocles.

⁵ Racine.

It was not God that gave me your commandment,
Nor Justice, consort of the Lords of Death,
That laid down *such* laws for the sons of men;
Nor did I hold that in your human edicts
Dwelt power to override the laws of God,
Unwritten, yet unshaken—laws that live
Not from to-day, nor yet from yesterday,
But always, though none knows how first made known.¹

Fall'n Cherube, to be weak is miserable.²

Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves.²

My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires;
My manhood, long misled with wandering fires,
Follow'd false lights; and when their glimpse was gone,
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.
Such was I, such by nature still I am;
Be Thine the glory, and be mine the shame.³

The Three Emperors were saintly men,
Yet to-day—where are they?
P'eng lived to a great age,
Yet he went at last, when he longed to stay.
And late or soon all go:
Wise and simple have no reprieve.
Wine may bring forgetfulness,
But does it not hasten old age?
If you set your heart on noble deeds,
How do you know that any will praise you?
By all this thinking you do Me injury:
You had better go where Fate leads—
Drift on the Stream of Infinite Flux
Without joy, without fear:
When you must go—then go
And make as little fuss as you can.⁴

¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*.

² Milton.

³ Dryden.

⁴ Tao Chien (A.D. 365-427: transl. by Arthur Waley). It is worth noting that "Romantic" *motifs* like "the Three Emperors" and "the Stream of Infinite Flux" hardly retain any glow of Romantic colour or excitement in the grey light of this calm wisdom.

Émile Faguet's criticism on *Lear*: "Que me font toutes ces bêtes féroces? La porte de la ménagerie a été ouverte et voilà tout."

Homer's Greeks advancing in measured silence, while the Trojans and their Asian allies shout and scream like cranes in the windy heavens. Lord Chesterfield's refrain, "The graces, the graces!"

Daughters of Zeus, you know what man's life is,
 How brief, and yet how long the while—
 Its epics, falls of sparrows; its tragedies
 Half farces and half vile;
 How every hero's sword at last grows brittle,
 How his dream fades, and night comes in a little—
 And you smile.

All else turns vanity: but yours the day
 Of little things, that grow not less.
 Our moments fly—enough if on their way
 You lent them loveliness.
 Alone of gods, you lie not; yours no Heaven
 That totters in the clouds—what you have given,
 We possess.

Grace, self-knowledge, self-control; the sense of form, the easy wearing of the chains of art hidden under flowers, as with some sculptured group that fills with life and liveness its straitened prison in the triangle of a pediment; idealism steadied by an unfaltering sense of reality; lamp and midnight-oil, rather than wine-cup—these are the salient features here.¹ We may seem drifting

¹ I am of course using "Classical" throughout in the critical, not the historical, sense; with reference not to the "Classical" literature of Greece and Rome, some of which is highly Romantic, but to work which gives the same sort of feeling as the poetry of Sophocles, Horace, or Racine, the prose of Demosthenes or La Bruyère. A good example of the elusiveness of the whole distinction occurs in Professor Laurie Magnus's *Dict. of European Lit.*, s.v. "Romance", where of More's *Utopia*

back to the old antithesis: "Classicism—Romanticism, Reason—Emotion". But the human mind is more complex than that. What are the psychological differences behind these spontaneous associations of the two words?

Civilized man is pulled this way and that by conflicting forces within him, which it is the whole difficult art of life to reconcile. First, there are the instinctive impulses of the human animal; secondly, there are the influences of other human beings, beginning with his parents, which build up in him certain ideals of behaviour, a certain conscience about misbehaviour, till these too become second nature. A man not only likes or dislikes certain things; he likes or dislikes himself for liking or disliking them. Thirdly, his intelligence presents him a shadow-show of what he calls "reality". Meredith has symbolized these three as Blood (or the Dragon, or the Worm), Spirit, and Brain. Freud has more clearly pictured the unhappy lot of the "ego" torn three ways between the "id", the "super-ego", and the "reality-principle". It is no longer a case of "the world, the flesh, and the devil"; but of the world, the flesh, and the ideal.

it is remarked: "The form was classical, yet the matter was romantic. No scholar's Latinity could cloak the *chivalric* origin of the sentiments which More's hero 'had customably in his mouth': 'He that hath no grave, is covered with the sky', and 'the way to heaven out of all places is of like length and distance'. These sayings were penned by Thomas More in the elegant Latin of 1516, but they echoed the chivalric *roman* of the 12th cent. in Norman France." Curiously enough the first of these "romantic" quotations is simply the classic tag of Lucan—"Caelo tegitur qui non habet urnam"; and the second surely goes back to the classical sentiment, expressed in one of the epigrams of the Anthology (x, 3), that whether from Athens or from Meroë the road runs straight to Hades. Neither of these ideas strikes me as "Romantic"; but that may, of course, be due to having recognized their classical origin.

The instinctive, animal "id" moves under us towards some object of desire, as a horse we are sitting on towards a tuft of grass. But the tuft of grass may be growing on unattainable or forbidden ground. "It can't be done", cries the reality-principle; "it isn't done", whispers the super-ego. And the rider, the poor ego, tugs desperately at the rein.

Naturally the ego finds life hard in such a triangle of forces. To simplify things it has recourse to blinkers; not however for the horse, but for the rider—for itself. It shuts its eyes to certain impulses and conflicts too difficult to resolve; they are "repressed"; but they still go on writhing unconsciously, like Enceladus turning for ever on his bed of pain under Etna.

This is the essential thing that has been studied of late years—the vital importance of what goes on in our minds without our knowledge. Much of the Freudian system may be purest moonshine. There is no harm in being sceptical about it; on the contrary. It is, indeed, essential to say: "Things work *as if* this or that were the case—*as if* there were an unconscious 'id', a partly unconscious 'ego' and 'super-ego'". With all human theories, indeed, it is vital to hold hard to this *as-ifery*; then they may prove extremely helpful, without duping us. All theories are crutches, not sceptres or wizards' wands.

It seems, then, *as if* a great deal went on under the surface of our conscious lives. And when we sleep, it is as if the censor who keeps these ideas and impulses submerged, the jailer, Charon, or Cerberus of these ghosts, relaxed his vigilance; so that his prisoners can slip out and revisit the upper world—in our dreams.

But even then they come more or less disguised to enjoy this temporary release.

Sometimes, indeed, dreams seem staged by normally conscious impulses which merely invent for themselves an imaginary situation that allows the sleeper to go on sleeping. Sometimes, at least, this appears to be the actual purpose of dreaming. So that the starving explorer regularly dreams of banquets, as if to prevent his hunger from waking him. Or the exile sees his home—

And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.¹

Or again, the dream-disguise may be a far more impenetrable fancy-dress, with bizarre symbols that only analysis can strip to reveal the repressed impulse beneath.

Now the lives men live and the art they make depends, I think, enormously on how strict and oppressive, or relaxed and easygoing, are their sense of reality and their sense of the ideal, their consciousness and their conscience. Different periods vary widely in this—and, within periods, different individuals. It is as if some men loved (like D. H. Lawrence), and some even loathed (like Lord Chesterfield), the preconscious and instinctive side of personality. In each of us lies this dark lake from which our conscious, reasoning selves have gradually emerged; strange emanations dance by night, or at solitary moments, on its surface; still stranger shapes

¹ These isles, which have been such an abiding home for the Romantic imagination, from *Lycidas*, through Ossian and Collins and even Johnson, down to Wordsworth and the *Canadian Boat Song* and Poe, provide incidentally a supreme example of the inter-dependence of form and idea. Would they not have missed their poetic destiny, despite all their poetic scenery and legend, but for the happy error of some far-off scribe who first inserted in the tame correctness of "Ebudes" that echoing "r", the "litera canina"?

appear to inhabit its hidden depths. Some of us love to dream on the banks of this mysterious mere; some try to fish or dive in it; others labour to brick it over and blot it out beneath a laboratory, or business-premises, or a dancing-floor.

In art these differences are specially important because there seems a good deal in common between all artistic creation and dreaming. Mediaeval poets made a habit of framing their poems in a setting of dream. Stevenson has described his indebtedness to the marionettes of sleep. Even the seemingly stolid Crabbe kept writing materials by his bed; for "many a good bit", so he told Lady Scott, came to him in dreams. Opium, again, has given us *Kubla Khan*, *The Confessions of an Opium-eater*, and Crabbe's *Sir Eustace Grey*. And even those who rely only on their waking moments, know how mysterious and capricious is the coming of good ideas and how easily they slip away; so that Samuel Butler found it necessary to keep note-books "to put salt on their tails". Even the Classic Pope, most deliberate and conscious of artists, would yet call up his amanuensis time after time on freezing nights to secure on paper the latest windfall of his brain. And as far back as the Classic Dryden there is a foreshadowing of the working of the unconscious mind, in his dedication of *The Rival Ladies*: "This worthless present was designed you, long before it was a play, when it was only a confused mass of Thoughts, tumbling over one another in the dark; when the Fancy was yet in its first work, moving the sleeping images of things towards the light, there to be distinguished, and then either chosen or rejected by the Judgment." And of this same process in the mind of Coleridge,

Professor Lowes has given a fascinating analysis in *The Road to Xanadu*. Idea after idea from Coleridge's reading or experience sinks into the reservoir of memory, to couple in the dark like unseen fish and produce strange hybrids that will one day leap back to the light—there to be caught and transferred, quivering with new life, to the Mariner's ocean or to the sacred stream of Kubla Khan. So considered, the differences between Classicism, Romanticism, and Realism turn out, I think, to be differences mainly of degree; depending on the strictness with which, if we may call them so, the reality-principle and the super-ego control and censor such emanations from the unconscious mind. The Realist writer tends to sacrifice everything to his sense of reality. The Classic, while ruthless towards some forms of unreality in the name of "good sense", elaborately cultivates others in the name of "good taste"; his impulses and fantasies are much more dominated by a social ideal, formed under the pressure of a finely civilized class.

Of the havoc too strong a sense of probability or of propriety can work with the imagination there remains no better example than Bentley's edition of Milton. Thus the poet writes—

No light, but rather darkness visible.

If the darkness was visible, growls Bentley, how could "sights of woe" be visible through it? Read—

No light, but rather a transpicuous gloom.

Milton's

As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole

becomes with equally good reason—

Distance which to express all measure fails.

And at the close of the whole poem, it will never do to say—

They hand in hand with wandr'ing steps and slow
Through Eden took their solitary way.

“Erratic steps? Very improper.” They were being guided by Providence. And why “solitary”? They were no more solitary out of Eden than they had been in it. Therefore read—

Then hand in hand with social steps their way
Through Eden took, with Heav'nly comfort cheer'd.

Bentley's *Milton* is indeed a perfect monument of the too Classic mind. The Romantic side of the poet is what this pedant can least bear. It is precisely those passages that have become most famous that the Master of Trinity again and again picks out as spurious: such as the catalogue of cities (“from the destined Walls of Cambalu”); the catalogue of serpents (“scorpions” are not serpents; and how can they hiss?); or, best of all, the catalogue of storied chivalry that “jousted at Aspramont or Montalban”. This is “romantic trash”. Even Proserpine “gathering flowers” and “carried off by gloomy Dis” is here carried off a second time by gloomier learning. But perhaps the finest example of such misplaced common sense is the treatment of Satan floating like Leviathan on the burning lake—

So stretch'd out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay.

“That is improper; for the Whale cannot *stretch out* or contract any of his Joints; he is always of the same length.”

By such intensive thought does literalism prevent whales, or poets, from adding cubits to their stature.

Johnson's objections to *Lycidas* show the same over-rigid sense of fact at work. "They had no flocks to batten." Whereas a Romantic like Mrs Radcliffe has no such qualms of pedantic honesty. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in defiance of all the astronomers since Ptolemy, can hardly admit a night without a moon. As soon as the sun sets, the more Romantic luminary is ruthlessly hauled above the horizon. Similarly Chateaubriand, describing to a friend an evening's journey, adds with a flash of candour: "Je sens bien que si la lune n'avait pas été là réellement, je l'aurais toujours mise dans ma lettre." Even the private letters of Romantics, it appears, cried for the moon.

The Romantic is in fact, like Joseph, a "dreamer". He may indeed, like a nightmare, be vividly realistic at moments. At moments he may be ruled, like the Classic, by a social ideal of conduct—partly social, at least, in its heroism and generosity, though in other ways rebelliously anti-social. But, essentially, he believes with Blake in letting his impulses and ideas run free—"Damn braces, bless relaxes"—"Exuberance is beauty".

The world of dreams is better far,
Above the light of the morning-star.

Alcohol, I gather, does not so much stimulate the brain as relax its higher controls. Romanticism is likewise an intoxication; though there are varying degrees of it, just as there are day-dreams, night-dreams, nightmares, drink-dreams, and drug-dreams. If I had to hazard an Aristotelian definition of Romanticism, it might run—"Romantic literature is a dream-picture of life;

viding sustenance and fulfilment for impulses cramped by society or reality".

Whereas the world of Classicism, on the contrary, is wide awake and strictly sober. For Lord Chesterfield, writing to his son, the unpardonable sin in good society is to let the mind wander. For Johnson, the theatre remains always a theatre—he does not talk, like Coleridge, of "suspending his disbelief". Even for Diderot, the good actor always remembers he is an actor. Classical French drama stands at attention, formal as a grenadier. "Monsieur Macbeth, prenez bien garde à Monsieur Macduff." The passions of Racine depend on none of that riot of realistic local colour and fantastic passion adored by the Romantics. When Boswell says certain music makes him want to rush into the thick of the fight, like an avalanche descends the inexorable snub—"I should never hear it, if it made me such a fool". Not because Johnson was anti-militarist; on the contrary, he has observed that all men are secretly ashamed of not being soldiers. Not because Johnson lacked passion; we know better. But even on his death-bed, with all his horror of death, he would have his clear-headedness clouded with no narcotics. And here poor Boswell with his martial ardours was being silly. That was the supremely forbidden thing; one must not be silly. He was getting drunk; and gentlemen should carry their liquor. "Things and actions are what they are," comes the calm, firm voice of the eighteenth century through the lips of Bishop Butler, "and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we wish to be deceived?"^x

^x Cf. Mme de Staël-Delaunay's briefer "Le vrai est comme il peut et n'a de mérite que d'être ce qu'il est."

Why? Precisely for that very reason. Things as they are leave so much to be desired. "I am never better", cries Hieronimo in the *Spanish Tragedy* "than when I am mad; then methinks I am a brave fellow; then I do wonders; but reason abuseth me, and there's the torment, there's the hell." Rousseau dreams all day long, like a fakir, in his little boat on the Lake of Bienné. The works of Chateaubriand are the endless melancholy reverie of a figure dreaming with folded arms on the St Helena of his lonely egotism. "Eh!" he cries, too histrionically, "Eh! qui n'a passé des heures entières assis sur le rivage d'un fleuve, à voir s'écouler les ondes?" Why, a great many people. Imagine Dr Johnson's contemptuous reply to such an idle question. But for René a dream is the richest legacy he can leave his own child. "Qu'on ne parle jamais de moi à ma fille," he writes to his Indian maiden, Céluta, "que René reste pour elle un homme inconnu, dont l'étrange destin¹ raconté la fasse rêver sans qu'elle en pénètre la cause; je ne veux être à ses yeux que ce que je suis, un pénible songe." "Les rêves", writes the Romantic Charles Nodier, "sont ce qu'il y a de plus doux et peut-être de plus vrai dans la vie." This refrain, *rêve, rêver, rêverie*, seems to echo from page to page of French Romanticism — *c'est un rêve sans trêve*.

Similarly in England, at the very gateway of the Revival, Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* is built out of a dream and written half in one.² "Visions, you know", writes its wise and charming author, whose memory,

¹ Cf. p. 103, footnote. One thinks too of Byron and Ada.

² On a later visit to Cambridge, Walpole suddenly recognized in the court of a College the model used by his unconscious memory to build his Castle in Italy.

for some reason, critics treat so disdainfully, "have always been my pasture; and so far from growing old enough to quarrel with their emptiness, I almost think there is no wisdom comparable to that of exchanging what is called the realities of life for dreams. Old castles, old pictures, old histories, and the babble of old people, make one live back into centuries that cannot disappoint one. The dead have exhausted their power of deceiving—one can trust Catherine of Medicis now." Macpherson's *Ossian* is a monotonous dream of shadows. "Dream not, Coleridge," cries Lamb, "of having tasted all the grandeur and wildness of fancy till you have gone mad." "You never dream", says Coleridge in his turn reproachfully to Hazlitt. And again: "I should much wish, like the Indian Vishnu, to float about along an infinite ocean, cradled in the flower of the Lotus, and wake once in a million years for a few minutes just to know that I was going to sleep a million years more". Even as a boy, seized in the street by a gentleman for picking his pocket, he turned out to have been merely waving his hands in a day-dream that he was Leander swimming the Hellespont to Hero's tower. In later years his dreams became less pleasant; the creator of *Kubla Khan* fled through much of his life like the figure in his *Ancient Mariner* who hears the stalking footsteps of a fiend behind. "Dreams with me are no Shadows, but the very Substances and foot-thick Calamities of my Life." And after him in the long pageant of Romantic dreamers follows de Quincey with his opium; Beddoes the "Dream-Pedlar"; Keats, "a dreaming thing, A fever of thyself", whose *La Belle Dame* arose from a dream of Dante's Francesca, and

whose *Endymion* de Quincey found, with some justice, vaguer "than the reveries of an oyster"; Shelley beating his wings high above the clouds; Byron,¹ whose *Dream* is among his still living poems, and who slept with pistol under pillow to ward off the too real phantoms of the night; Clare turning back to refuge in madness from "the living sea of waking dreams"; Tennyson hypnotizing himself into strange trances by the repetition of his own name; Browning with his visionary visit to Childe

¹ Cf. Peacock's parody of Byron, Mr Cypress, to whom Mr Hilary observes: "You talk like a Rosicrucian, who will love nothing but a sylph, who does not believe in the existence of a sylph, and who yet quarrels with the whole Universe for not containing a sylph." Peacock wrote even more wisely than he knew. Chateaubriand has told in the *Memoirs* published long after Peacock wrote, how in his young years at Combourg he too lived through a long dream-romance with an imaginary *sylphide*. Similarly Shelley's poet, in *Prometheus*:

Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses
But feeds on the ærial kisses
Of shapes that haunt love's wildernesses.

We have travelled far here (too far, some will find) from the robust, if cynical, Epicureanism of a Classic like Congreve—

You think she's false, I'm sure she's kind,
I'll take her body, you her mind.
Who has better bargain?

And yet, so important is a sane sense of reality in life, one may well doubt if the realistic Congreve gave as much pain to those who loved him as the idealistic Shelley.

Contrast too that most typically eighteenth-century summary of life, so sadly sane, addressed by Walpole to Mme du Deffand: "Rendez-vous à la raison, prends le monde comme il est; n'attendez pas à le refaire à votre gré, et ne ressemblez pas à ce prince dans les contes persans qui courait le monde pour trouver une princesse qui ressemblât à certain portrait qu'il avait vu au trésor de son père, et qui se trouve avoir été la maîtresse de Salomon".

Roland's tower; Poe with his stud of speckled nightmares—

And all my days are trances,
 And all my nightly dreams
 Are where thy dark eye glances,
 And where thy footstep gleams—
 In what ethereal dances!
 By what eternal streams!

Here too paces Rossetti,

Master of the murmuring courts
 Where the shapes of sleep convene—

till sleeplessness and chloral mastered him; his sister Christina,

Dreaming through the twilight
 That does not rise nor set;

Morris following to the World's End, like his own Pharamond, the beauty seen and loved in dream; Francis Thompson, dallying with his opium amid labouring London, like the idle poppy amid the wheat—

My fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread;

the languid O'Shaughnessy, the languider Dowson; de la Mare "crazed with the spell of far Arabia", Yeats in his Celtic twilight; and so to the *Surréalistes*, whose principle it is to write not merely of dreams, or after dreaming, but in one.

Not only did the Romantics prefer to create their art in this atmosphere of dream. Even the critical power of appreciating art seemed to Stendhal something only to be acquired by a habit "de rêverie un peu mélancolique". Even history, not altogether to its advantage, became in Romantic hands a dream likewise. "*L'Histoire*

de France de Michelet", says Heine¹ (in a passage that I only came upon after the rest of this was written), "est ce recueil de rêves, c'est tout le moyen-âge rêveur qui vous regarde de ses yeux profonds, douloureux, avec son sourire de spectre, et l'on est presque effrayé par la criante vérité de la couleur et des formes. En fait, pour la peinture de cette époque somnambule, il fallait précisément un historien somnambule comme Michelet." Less Romantic critics will be more critical of this Romanticized history; but the passage well brings out the persistent connection between the Middle Ages, Romanticism, and dream. Even autobiography proved too real a form for Romantics to write correctly.² Even their own past lives danced in a coloured mist before their eyes. But the clearest manifesto of this side of Romantic dream-life, of the flight from reality, remains Baudelaire's.

Il faut être toujours ivre. Tout est là; c'est l'unique question... Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise. Mais enivrez-vous.

Et si quelquefois, sur les marches d'un palais, sur l'herbe verte d'un fossé, dans la solitude morne de votre chambre, vous vous réveillez, l'ivresse déjà diminuée ou disparue, demandez au vent, à la vague, à l'étoile, à l'oiseau, à l'horloge, à tout ce qui fuit, à tout ce qui gémit, à tout ce qui roule, à tout ce qui chante, à tout ce qui parle, demandez quelle heure il est; et le vent, la vague, l'étoile, l'oiseau, l'horloge, vous répondront: "Il est l'heure de s'enivrer! Pour n'être pas les esclaves martyrisés du Temps, enivrez-vous; enivrez-vous sans cesse! De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise."

¹ See Lasserre, *Le Romantisme Français*, p. 387.

² Cf. the vagaries of Chateaubriand and Coleridge in their reminiscences and Sainte-Beuve's scathing criticism of Lamartine's *Confidences* in *Causeries du Lundi*, I.

Romanticism, in a word, was the Sleeping Beauty dreaming of the Fairy Prince; unfortunately the Fairy Prince is apt to lose his way; and the Sleeping Beauty may then console herself with other spirits that come, like the Arabian kind, out of bottles, but end all too unromantically in *delirium tremens*.

The eighteenth century had always had at its ear two voices, like the warning Daemon of Socrates; one whispering "That is not intelligent", the other, "That is not done". Romanticism seems to me, essentially, an attempt to drown these two voices and liberate the unconscious life from their tyrannical repressions. Like the accompanying French Revolution, it is the insurrection of a submerged population; but, this time, a population of the mind. "*Fancy*," remarked Rymer, the orthodox neo-Classic, "*Fancy* leaps and frisks and away she's gone, whilst *Reason* rattles the chains and follows after." Now at last those chains were broken; the Bastille of those twin oppressors, Probability and Propriety, was stormed and obliterated. In this sense, indeed, "Le Romantisme, c'est la Révolution".¹

The views of writers themselves on the actual business of composition help to confirm this, by differing significantly, according as they are more Classical or Romantic. The Romantic, depending more on processes outside his conscious control, believes, like Plato, in "inspiration"

¹ Jung, with his idea of the collective Unconscious, would possibly put it that the sensitive minds of poets and artists now became aware that an essential part of human nature was being starved. But this seems only a rather mystical way of saying that healthy instincts first reasserted themselves in certain more imaginative personalities; because these artists were more sensitive, they felt more distinctly where their shoes pinched.

or "furor poeticus", a divine drunkenness. Whereas Davenant, at the dawn of neo-Classicism, already sniffs at this idea. It is, for him, a relic of the primitive days when poets, being also priests, were of course charlatans, who found it politic to pretend to be possessed. Poets, he holds, should be "painful", even if they are abused for lack of fury. And painful indeed Davenant and his successors often contrived to be. For Pope, again, the cool, conscious, critical judgement is so important, that he keeps his poems for two years before publishing them; less exacting in this than Horace who demanded nine. The Classic Johnson, with his bitter Grub Street experience, finds it foppery in Gray and Milton to depend on moods or seasons and insists that a man can *always* write who sets himself "doggedly" to it; Trollope, that healthy realist, proved it for himself by turning out his thousand words an hour with the precision of a sausage-machine—much to the disgust of the British public, when he revealed it. For the British public cherished far more Romantic ideas of inspiration. Balzac, again, who soon turned from Romance to Realism, condemns as fatal for writers the romantic reverie, which he calls "smoking enchanted cigarettes". He himself preferred to write eighteen hours a day on black coffee.

But Ronsard had possessed no such self-control.

Poète je suis
Plein de fureur; car faire je ne puis
Un trait de vers, soit qu'un prince commande,
Soit qu'une dame ou l'ami m'en demande,
Et à tous coups la verve ne me prend:
Je bée en vain, et mon esprit attend
Tantost six mois, tantost un an sans faire
Vers qui me puisse ou plaire ou satisfaire.

For Wordsworth poetry is "the *spontaneous* overflow of powerful feelings". Burns owned that he had always failed when, twice or thrice, he had tried to force himself. Professor Housman in our own day has illustrated this importance of the Unconscious in poetry. In his own experience slightly bad health was a help.¹ (I have found the impulse similarly heightened by unhappiness—just as discomfort in sleep may stimulate us to dream.) He would take a pint of beer at lunch and a walk in the afternoon, his least intellectual time of day. Lines or even stanzas would bubble up, as from the pit of the stomach; together with a vague idea of the poem as a whole. Later, a return of inspiration might fill up the gaps; or this might have to be done by "the brain". Thus two stanzas of a poem came on Hampstead Heath; a third "with a little coaxing after tea"; the fourth had to be written thirteen times over and took a whole twelvemonth.

Other Romantics, however, have been able to write and dream with extraordinary facility; just as some people can go to sleep the moment their heads touch the pillow, or even hypnotize themselves. George Sand is said to have finished one novel at 2 a.m., then taken a fresh sheet and started another. Byron could compose while dressing for balls; Morris once turned out seven hundred verses in a day. But it is symptomatic that they both hated correcting. Like Shakespeare, who never blotted a line, and Scott, who could send manuscripts to the printer without re-reading them, Byron refused to revise, or even to believe that any gain could come of it. "I am like a tiger: if I miss my first spring, I go grumbling

¹ Cf. p. 8.

back to my jungle." So too Morris preferred to rewrite where necessary, rather than polish. The explanation is, I imagine, that the critical wakefulness of revision is the extreme opposite of a creative semi-trance; and even writers who can induce the trance quite easily, find it hard to combine with the vigilant mood of self-criticism.

Other Romantics, however, seem able even to do this: the manuscript of *Atalanta in Calydon* is covered with corrections; and Rossetti irritated even Swinburne by his endless second thoughts.

From all this it is clearly hard to generalize. But I believe that though Romantic writers are often by no means (as they say of fruit-trees) "shy bearers", still "shy bearers" have generally Romantic tendencies—like Coleridge and Housman. It would surprise me to find many really Classical writers so dependent on "inspiration"—on processes quite beyond conscious control. Indeed their control is often too conscious: such presence of mind may mean absence of poetry. In a word the typical Romantic, I believe, tends to be either distinctly prolific, like Hugo, or distinctly costive, like Coleridge, at least so far as good work is concerned: the typical Classic is less likely, in this also, to reach extremes. He is often able to write by simply willing it; but, being more self-critical, less ready to write anyhow.

At all events, whereas the diverse theories of Romanticism quoted earlier seemed one-sided—each like a single photograph of a building taken from a different aspect—it now becomes possible, I think, to assemble them as parts of a more intelligible whole.

Thus Romanticism is not, in Goethe's phrase, "disease". It is intoxicated dreaming. But it is easy to see, and we shall see, that such auto-intoxication can often become the reverse of healthy.

Again, Romanticism is not simply a revolt of Emotion against Reason, though it often is; nor yet of Imagination against Reason—a "renascence of Wonder"; it can be both of these, or either. As there are two tyrants to rebel against—the sense of reality and the sense of society, the rebellion may be highly imaginative yet not very passionate, like much of Coleridge; or passionate yet not highly imaginative, like much of Byron; or both, like *Adonais*.

That rules like the Unities should be among the first things to be flung aside by Romanticism, follows naturally. For it is hard to dream in a stiff shirt-front; and exhilarated revellers dislike being asked to toe chalk lines on the floor. Far better Herrick's "wild civility" or, as Musset writes of R  gnier—

tes beaux vers ing  nus,
Tant  t l  gers, tant  t boiteux, toujours pieds nus.¹

And so Romanticism, in order that it may be free to dream, becomes a literary Protestantism, Liberalism, or rule of *laissez-faire*.

Again, the Middle Ages were its obvious spiritual home. For they were mystical, mysterious, and remote; and they had been finally killed at the Renaissance by this hated Classicism, which the Romantics now pro-

¹ Cf. Francis Thompson:

We speak a lesson taught we know not how,
And what it is that from us flows,
The hearer better than the utterer knows.

posed to kill in its turn. But the mediaeval is no essential part of the Romantic.

Finally, Romanticism is only partly opposed to Realism; its true enemy is the hackneyed and humdrum present, whether squalid or academic—a very different thing. Snatches of realism remain very welcome to Romantic sensationalists, especially as an escape from the starched dignities of Classicism; just as a courtier of the old régime used, he said, on returning from the pomps of Versailles, to stand and stare at a dog gnawing a bone in the street—here at last was something “real”.

Thus Romantic diction shows fondness not only for the romantically remote, in place or time, but also for the realistic. While Coleridge, Keats, and Morris revived words long hoary and moss-grown, Wordsworth, on the contrary, copied the actual speech of “huts where poor men lie” and Hugo boasted that he had stuck a red cap of liberty on the Dictionary of the Academy.

Further, from its relaxation of the censorship over the Unconscious or the Preconscious, follow naturally certain other features of Romantic literature.

We have become familiar with the enormous part played by symbolism in all dreaming. It plays an enormous part also in enriching the imagery of this “literature of dream”. Dryden with his Classicism had already found Shakespeare’s style “pestered” with figurative expressions. Aristotle and Longinus would certainly have shuddered at his extravagances. But with the Romantic Revival, after the hackneyed metaphors and similes of neo-Classicism, appeared a new wealth of images, often as grotesque and fantastic as a dream,

which would have seemed to Boileau or Johnson, in the phrase of Beddoes—

like a satyr grinning in a brook
To find Narcissus' round and downy face.

Half a century later these two attitudes could still clash. The young Parnassians had asked Hugo for a letter of approval to serve as preface to *Le Parnasse Contemporain*. In reply,

Verbosa et grandis epistola venit
A Capreis—

or rather from Guernsey. According to Anatole France, it began: "Jeunes gens, je suis le passé: vous êtes l'avenir. Je ne suis qu'une feuille: vous êtes la forêt. Je ne suis qu'une chandelle: vous êtes les rayons de soleil. Je ne suis qu'un bœuf: vous êtes les rois mages." And so on for four pages. A practical joke was suspected. No, it was deadly earnest. They decided to do without this too similitudinous benediction.¹

Again the Romantic writers use language in a dreamier way; with vague overtones and associations that shall echo through a mind whose attention is not riveted but half relaxed.

I know not whether
I see your meaning; if I do, it lies
Upon the wordy wavelets of your voice
Dim as the evening shadow in a brook,
When the least moon has silver on't no larger
Than the pure white of Hebe's pinkish nail.²

Such was his weapon, and he traced with it
Upon the waters of my thoughts, these words:
"I am the death of flowers and nightingales
And small-lipped babes, that give their souls to summer

¹ See Souriau, *Hist. du Romantisme*, II, 294.

² Beddoes.

To make a perfumed day with: I shall come,
 A death no larger than a sigh to thee
 Upon a sunset hour." And so he passed
 Into the place where faded rainbows are,
*Dying along the distance of my mind.*¹

Such thoughts are themselves like shadows in water;
 such phrases like the water's drowsy lullaby. In the
 Romantic hands that thus "writ in water", other words
 besides Keats's "forlorn" grow "like a bell"; indeed
 a Romantic sentence is often a whole carillon of such bells,
 an Easter chime that calls the ghosts of forgotten meanings
 to rise again.

The fairy fancies range
 And, lightly stirr'd,
 Ring little bells of change
 From word to word.²

We are far here from the days

When *Phoebus* touch'd the Poet's trembling Ear
 With one supreme Commandment: "Be thou clear".³

How blind by contrast the eighteenth century could
 be to the dreamy associations of words is well seen in an
 astonishing passage by the Abbé de Pons (1714), vindicating
 his right to judge Homer without even knowing
 Greek:⁴ "Chaque nation a ses signes fixes pour représen-
 ter tous les objets que son intelligence embrasse.
 Qu'on ne dise donc plus que les beautés qu'on a senties
 en lisant Homère ne peuvent être parfaitement rendues
 en français. Ce qu'on a senti ou pensé, on peut l'exprimer
 avec une élégance *égale* dans toutes les langues." To
 this good Abbé words are merely like algebraic symbols;
 his mind concentrates on the barest literal meaning;

¹ Beddoes.

² Tennyson.

³ Austin Dobson.

⁴ See Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, XIII, 154.

to let it wander away to half-conscious associations would be reprehensible wool-gathering. He did not guess that such wool might be the Golden Fleece of poetry. These neo-Classics were not emotionally over-cold, but mentally over-alert; not unfeeling, but unsleeping.

So with metre. The essential difference between Romantic verse, in England and France, and the immaculate heroics and Alexandrines of the Classics is that rhythm has now become once more an intoxicant. "Enivrez-vous!" Pope or Gray, Racine or Boileau can speak perfectly; they can declaim magnificently; but they do not sing. Their verse is exquisite coffee in lordly porcelain; it "cheers but not inebriates"; it is not the wine of Dionysus. It hardly performs at all the essential task of more dancing rhythms—the task of hypnotizing the reader into a dreamy trance, where his sense of reality is drugged and, at the same time, his suggestibility heightened. The music of Handel, Gluck, and Mozart (such a complete refutation of the supposed passionlessness of the eighteenth century) failed to infect the sister-art of poetry. In literature, for a century and a half Apollo had harped with a dignity sometimes splendid, often monotonous; now at last the wild flutings of Marsyas were once more to catch at the heart and go shuddering down the spine.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call.

My ornaments are arms,
My pastime is in war,
My bed is cold upon the wold,
My lamp yon star.¹

¹ Lockhart.

Tirra, lirra, by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

And the Witch stepped down from her casement.
In the hush of night he heard
The calling and wailing in dewy thicket
Of bird to hidden bird.¹

The old mayor climbed the belfry tower,
The ringers ran by two, by three:
"Pull, if ye never pulled before,
Good ringers, pull your best," quoth he.
"Play uppe, play uppe, O Boston Bells!
Play all your changes, all your swells,
Play uppe the Brides of Enderby!"²

Beau cavalier, qui partez pour la guerre,
Qu'allez-vous faire
Si loin d'ici?
Voyez-vous pas que la nuit est profonde
Et que le monde
N'est que souci?³

Far the calling bugles hollo,
High the screaming fife replies,
Gay the files of scarlet follow:
Woman bore me, I will rise.⁴

To-day knights-errant are rust and dust, witches
ashes, war a folly; but as the trees with Orpheus, so to
such music we can still forget our most stiffly rooted
convictions. It was not for nothing that in a realistic
moment Shelley compared himself for unreality to a
gin-palace. Intoxication is the essence of such poetry
as this.

So with Romantic settings and subject-matter. Always
"la princesse lointaine", the blue of distance. For

¹ Walter de la Mare.

² Jean Ingelow.

³ Alfred de Musset.

⁴ Housman.

remoteness is a feeling associated with dreams; and, again, remoteness makes it easier to dream—there is less danger of colliding with a brute fact. It may be remoteness in time—

When the last bubbles of Atlantis broke
Among the quieting of its heaving floor.¹

Very old are the woods
And the buds that break
Out of the briar's boughs
When March winds wake,
So old with their beauty are—
Oh no man knows
Through what wild centuries
Roves back the rose.²

Or it may be remoteness in space, as with Heine's fir-tree—the distance of far Arabia or Xanadu, of Tipperary or "the lands where the Jumbies live".

Distance presents the object fair
With Charming features and a graceful Air,
But when we come to seize th' inviting prey,
Like a Shy Ghost, it vanishes away.

The distance lends enchantment to the view
And robes the mountain in its azure hue.³

Or, again, it may be that other remoteness of undiscovered countries of the mind. "Who", says Fuller, "hath sailed about the world of his own heart, sounded each creek, surveyed each corner, but that there still remains much *terra incognita* in himself?"

The Romantics found this *terra incognita* of the soul their happy hunting ground, And yet dreamers may

¹ Gordon Bottomley.

² Walter de la Mare.

³ Norris of Bemerton and Campbell (quoted in Abercrombie. *Romanticism*).

not make the best explorers; the results, as we shall see, were not always very happy. "Enfin on est attristé, en même temps qu'effrayé", writes Anatole France of Hugo, "de ne pas rencontrer dans son œuvre énorme, au milieu de tant de monstres, une seule figure humaine." Hugo is an extreme, but not an isolated case. It is the passionate personality of these writers, the intensity of their atmosphere, that makes their real strength. "I have no pity, I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails. It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain. . . . He gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy. . . . his sharp cannibal teeth. . . . his basilisk eyes"—these things do not come from some tenth-rate novelette: they are from *Wuthering Heights*, which remains a masterpiece in spite of such Satanic crudities.

Similarly in other fields where more conscious critical control is needed—in the construction of a plot, in the creation of a *prose* style—the Romantic in his semi-trance is often inferior to the century before. Then, a gentleman regarded his readers as his guests. He considered it his duty to face the toil of hard writing in order to give them the pleasure of easy reading; unlike Mr Joyce who has touchingly remarked "The demand that I make of my reader is that he should devote his whole life to reading my works". Of the more serious weaknesses which come from the Romantic surrender to impulse it will be time to speak when we deal with its decadence.

These, then, seem to me the essential effects of the wine of Romanticism. Naturally they vary enormously with

the strength of the dose. One glass will quicken a man's intelligence and observation; a dozen will undermine them. "Dry light is best"; but too dry a life may not be—at least in matters of the imagination. The eighteenth century carried dryness to excess. The Romantic reaction was healthy; but, like most reactions, it became extravagant and so unhealthy in its turn. The Romantic writer, squeezing "Joy's grape" against his palate, grows more eloquent, more magical in the music of phrase and imagery, more impressive in the frank intensity of his feeling and imagination, in the atmosphere that only passion can create. He can be a bewitching companion. But he loses more and more, as his intoxication increases, the balance, the proportion, the control, the power to coordinate, of the great masters; the intelligence and grace of the man of the world; the quiet sympathy a writer needs in order to observe and delineate characters other than his own or shadows of his own—that exaggerated ego which in the Romantics often grows as bloated as an ant-queen among her crawling subjects; fertile, but grotesque. Such, for better and for worse, seem to me the symptoms of Romanticism, this dream-gift of Dionysus, who brings release for the soul in chains, but for those that follow him too far, new chains heavier still; who has wrecked life after life, and yet immeasurably enriched the world.

CHAPTER II

THE CROCODILES OF ALACHUA; OR THE PAST OF ROMANTICISM

THE essential difference, it has so far been suggested, between Classicism and Romanticism is that the control exerted by the conscious mind, particularly by the sense of reality and the sense of society, is strict in the first—while in the second it is relaxed, somewhat as in drunkenness or dream. The words “Classic” and “Romantic” have, indeed, become so worn, smudged, and ambiguous that it might be wiser to invent new terms altogether. We might speak of “hyparistic” and “oneiristic” writing, from the Greek words for “waking” and “dream”. But such words are horrible, if they can possibly be avoided; further, the description of Romantic literature as simply “dream-work” does not quite suffice. Except in its extreme forms, it does usually retain a super-ego, an ideal of conduct, of its own; often a highly quixotic one. But first it is worth looking back to earlier literature for examples of the “romantic” in its widest sense in order to test and check this theory of its nature. By “romantic”, I mean, as has been said, things that give the same general feeling, of dream-life, as *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* or *The Ancient Mariner* or *The Haystack in the Floods*.

Romanticism is indeed as old as European literature—as old as the *Odyssey*. It is even older—there were geniuses before Homer. They are nameless now and forgotten, but their work remains; so much a part, still, of our lives that we take its existence for granted, like

rain or sunlight, and fail to realize what gifts of imagination must have gone to create those legends of Greek mythology which no other race has ever equalled—not even the race of Cuchulain and the Celtic Twilight, nor the race of Sigurd and the Twilight of the Gods. It is the fancy of prehistoric Greeks that has turned our heavens to a constellated tapestry of the stories of Orion and Andromeda and the rest; that has planted our earth with flowers “*inscripti nomine regum*”—memorials of ill-starred youth and maid, like narcissus and hyacinth, the sunflower of Clytie and the anemone of Adonis. But this earlier Hellas shows one striking contrast to the later Greece of Sophocles and Thucydides. It breathes a fragrance of young romance which was one day to intoxicate Keats, even when he found its blossoms pressed and dry in the *hortus siccus* of Lemprière. Its legends turn, again and again, on that romantic passion which Aristophanes admired Aeschylus for ignoring and reviled Euripides for portraying. Here, too, magic transformations and many-headed monsters, all the fauna and flora of fairyland, luxuriate as freely as in Ariosto, or *The Arabian Nights*. In fact, few things are more romantic than “classical” mythology.

True, even in this romantic childhood the Greek sense of reality is already alive and awake; there is already a guardian set at the portal of this early dream-world to turn back shapes too fantastic. “Gorgons and hydras and chimaeras dire” may pass, to take their permanent place in the best European society; even oddities like the Graiai, those three old women sharing one eye and one tooth between them, who might suitably figure in a Communist’s nightmare, manage to scrape by. But

nothing is allowed here like the hyperbolic hero of Indian epic who stops the ten thousand arrows of a hostile army in mid-air by as many discharged from his own bow, or the daring extravagances of the Celtic imagination. The Greek Lynceus may see through wood or stone; but there is nothing like MacRoth, the spy of Maeve, as described in James Stephens's *Deirdre*: "He would spy in a bee-hive; he would spy on the horned end of the moon; he would spy in the middle of the sea, and would know which wave it was that drowned him and which wave it was that urged it."

Still, Greek mythology remains genuinely romantic. It is worth noting, too, the reappearance here of other familiar symptoms of Romanticism—incest and rebellion against the Father-God, as seen in the stories of Zeus and Hera, of the children of Acolus, of Myrrha, Phaedra, and Jocasta; or in the mutilation of Ouranos by his insurgent son Cronos, who is dethroned by *his* son Zeus, who would have been overpowered in turn by *his* son, had he not refrained from the love of Thetis. Indeed, Greek legend has provided the name for that corner-stone of Freudianism, the Oedipus-complex itself.

But the actual literature of Greece already shows itself more self-disciplined. Homer, indeed, sometimes dreams; and was therefore accused of "nodding". "The dreams of Zeus"—so an ancient critic, disapproving yet admiring, describes the Romantic elements of the *Odyssey*. This writer, the so-called "Longinus", whose treatise *On Great Writing* probably belongs to the first century of the Roman Empire, shows most interestingly the inhibitions of the honest "Classical" mind. His sensitive sympathy recognizes that great writing should

bring intoxication, not information; yet he is genuinely jarred by anything at all fantastic—"this will never do". Even a lovely metaphor like Plato's description of his unfortified Utopia—"the walls of our city shall be suffered to sleep in the earth"—is too loud for him; just as Aristotle had found the metaphor that the *Odyssey* "held the mirror up to nature" strained and unnatural. And when he is faced with the miracles of the *Odyssey*, "Longinus" becomes, like so many Classics, quite superstitiously unsuperstitious. He is afraid of fairies just because they do *not* exist.

All is bot gaistis and elriche fantasies,
Of browneis and bogillis full this buke—

so Gavin Douglas was one day to write in delighted praise at the beginning of his version of Virgil's Sixth Book: such power had the mediaeval mind to throw its many-coloured glamour even over the grey purity of the classical Netherworld. But for "Longinus" "browneis and bogillis" are highly suspect company. "In the *Odyssey*," he writes, "Homer is like the setting sun, less vigorous, not less great.... As if Ocean were ebbing back into the lonely isolation of his own confines,¹ so the poet's greatness is here receding and he winds his way among things fabulous and fantastic. In saying this, I am not forgetting the storm-scenes of the *Odyssey* and the episode of Polyphemus" (it is interesting that he could swallow Polyphemus) "and certain other passages; none the less we are faced with a writer weakened by old age, though it still remains the old age of Homer. Throughout the poem the fabulous does predominate

¹ The ebbing tide leaves monsters stranded behind it.

over the real. And I point this out to show how easily failing genius lapses into the ludicrous—into things like the shutting of the winds in a bag, or Circe's turning of men into swine—'squealing porkers', as Zoilus called them...." Zoilus, "the Homer-scurge", had been an earlier critic of Alexandria; and it is amusing to find the same sort of unimaginative cavil recurring two thousand years later on the Classic lips of Lord Chesterfield. Achilles, he observes, "wore the strongest armour in the world, which I humbly apprehend to be a blunder, for a horse-shoe clapped to his vulnerable heel would have been sufficient". The blunder is really his lordship's, for the legend of the hero's vulnerable heel was unknown to Homer. But how over-wakeful and over-sober, here as always, is the Classic sense of fact! When in the Laestrygonian land, with its fjord pale under the mid-night sun, the comrades of Odysseus enter the hall of King Antiphates, they find his queen—some ancestress of Brynhild?—beside her hearth. "She was tall as a mountain-crag; and they hated her." Well, they might; in a moment they were to be eaten; but they did not hate such disproportion more intensely than Classic critics.

Plato blamed Homer because his gods were too immoral; Alexandria blamed him because his young ladies were too free; "Longinus", because his marvels were too incredible; Perrault, and such neo-Classics, because his manners were too real, his heroes too hail-fellow-well-met with swineherds. Throughout the history of criticism again and again these three aberrations recur—priggery, snobbery and over-realism.

But Homer is by no means the last Greek Romantic. "Longinus" and his like were similarly torn between

enthusiasm and disapproval over Aeschylus. A giant in his own generation, he jarred on posterity; he was too like Isaiah or Marlowe. Just as men said Homer nodded and dreamed, the rumour went that Aeschylus dipped his pen in the wine-pot. His imagery was so undisciplined. He roared like a bull, they said, piled up phrases like towers, talked mountains. "A slippery, lonely-hearted, eagle-haunted crag, that towers sheer beyond the leap of goat, the gaze of man"—that phrase of his *Suppliants* is a fit symbol of the poet himself. He too remained a "lonely-hearted crag"—(how many other Greek writers would have used that epithet?)—remote from the ways of common men; until far away in his Sicilian exile, as legend told, an eagle dropped a tortoise on him, thinking the old man's head in truth a stone. Aeschylus formed in his own image, we feel (as Milton with Satan), that rebellious Titan chained to his crag near the North Pole, who so fired the imagination of Romantics like Shelley and Byron;¹ who turns from the cruelty of destiny, almost like Wordsworth, to Nature's silent witness;² whose imagination ranges like Marlowe's among the echoing names of the far countries of the world—

Then take the Southward road
Till you meet the army of the Amazons,
Haters of men, that shall find their home hereafter
In Themiscyra round the Thermodon,
Where the jaw of Salmydessus cleaves the sea—
Sour host to sailors, step-mother of ships.

¹ Cf. *Manfred*. Byron speaks of the *Prometheus* as being "so much in my head that I can easily conceive its influence on all or anything that I have ever written".

² Cf. the imaginative fancy preserved by Hyginus, that Prometheus knew the future because in the silence of the lonely nights he had overheard the singing of the Fates.

What imagery! Little wonder that from the fourth century B.C. till the nineteenth A.D. and the Romantic Revival, this "lonely-hearted crag" remained mostly lost in cloud. For the Classic Fontenelle Aeschylus is "une espèce de fou"; for the Classic Dryden he "tears it upon the tripos". He was, indeed, "huge as a mountain, and they hated him".

In Euripides, the rival who superseded him in later antiquity and criticizes him in his own plays as well as in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, there appears Romance of another type. It was for uncontrolled imagination that strict Classicism attacked Homer and Aeschylus; it is for the other Romantic fault, uncontrolled passion, that Euripides was above all condemned. They had sinned against the reality-principle; he outrages the super-ego of his contemporaries. Eros is indeed the most Romantic of the Immortals, more even than Dionysus; for passion is a headier intoxicant even than wine. "Speaking in a perpetual hyperbole", runs the dry phrase of Bacon, "is comely in nothing but love." Aeschylus, lover of hyperbole as he was, boasts in the *Frogs* of never having staged woman in that state (though it would be unfair to forget the strange wild passion between his Achilles and Patroclus which still quivers in the fragments of his lost *Myrmidons*); but a new note rings out in the lines of Euripides' lost *Stheneboea*:

Love turns to a poet
Even the heart that was sealed to song before.¹

¹ Cf. the adorable lines on Lord Falkland's grandfather in Burford Church, composed by the dead man's wife:

Love made me poet,
And this I writt,
My harte did doe yt,
And not my witt.

Here stands one of the simple truths that Classicism too often forgot.

Familiar is Lucian's story of the Romantic Revival in Abdera, city renowned for its human geese, when the performance by a strolling company of the *Andromeda* of Euripides sent the whole place mad, so that the streets were filled with pale-faced gentlemen declaiming—

O Love, high sovran lord of Gods and men!

We who possess *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* cannot share the rage of Aristophanes at this first staging of romantic passion; any more than, remembering Macbeth's Porter, we can sympathize much when the rags in which Euripides loved to disguise his characters become red rags to the comic poet. It is merely interesting to note how already Romanticism joins hands with Realism, as the dramatist turns for new subjects to slaves, barbarians, and women, whom the city of Athena treated as inferior beings. Only here again the search for new sensations led the poet down stranger paths, to the incest of Phaedra and of Canace.

But the colours of Romance lie most clearly of all on the mountains of the *Bacchae*, lit by the last rays of the old poet's genius. Among the many-sided meanings of that mystery-play it is not altogether fanciful to find there an allegory of Romanticism itself; to see in the puritanic and pedantic Pentheus a dim ancestor of "one Boileau"; to hear the chants of the Maenads shrilling down the centuries to reverberate on the first night of *Hernani*.

All the mountain there

Went wild and revelled with them—all its beasts—

And all the waste was quickened, leapt and lived.

Euripides reserves his own judgement in this eternal conflict between the forces of self-expression and of

self-control; he has not recanted; he is still a Greek and a questioner. But it is as if this tired thinker in his last exile among the wilds of Macedonia, where in real life queens could still dance braceleted with writhing serpents, had felt like many another the call of Nature's tameless energy and the ecstasy, unsicklied by self-questioning, of that Noble Savage, who has since danced like a will-o'-the-wisp before the vision of Rousseau, of Chateaubriand, of D. H. Lawrence. For indeed Dionysus is god as well as beast and no mere phantom of a Romantic dream. "Exuberance is beauty"—"Energy is Eternal Delight"—"Those who restrain desire do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained". So rings his gospel through the mouth of his prophet Blake. It is an Everlasting Gospel: though it is not the only one.

But the day of Greece was ending; as its sun descended, there spread eastward the giant shadow of Rome. The time of great deeds was over; in that after-twilight, Romance, bird of the dusk, re-opens its dreamy wings. The future was dark; the present drab; men turned perforce to the past. The fourth century B.C., like the eighteenth A.D., had been an age of prose, of oratory, of philosophy; as in France after Napoleon, so here after Alexander, there came a new wave of Romantic poetry. In the dusty streets of his great city, Alexandria, poets dreamed of young shepherds piping, as in the Golden Age, by the blue sea of Sicily; in its dusty libraries they dreamed of young adventurers in the morning of the world steering, beyond the blue Symplegades, out into unknown seas to win the love of passionate witch-maidens in whispering palaces of the East. The countryside of Theocritus looks forward to the countryside of Wordsworth

and Tennyson; the Medea of Apollonius Rhodius to the Dido of Virgil, the Medea of Ovid, and all those Legends of Fair Women that haunted mediaeval Romance.

But Rome entered on the heritage of Alexander. The legions mounted the Acropolis. The precious vase of the Greek city-state fell shattered, the fragrance of its Hellenism flowing away down the channels of a grey cosmopolitanism. The poet found himself no longer a citizen, but a lonely human soul, face to face with the impersonal vastness of humanity. All the more he turned back to the romance of individual passion, like Meleager the Gadarene with his Heliodora and his Zenophil; or to the romance of Nature's changing, yet changeless beauty, which his active forefathers had not dallied to dream over; or to the romance of laments far lovelier than Ossian's over the ruined glories of the past. Still Pan lived on; still, as in Greece to-day,

High up the mountain-meadows, Echo with never a
tongue
Sings back to each bird in answer the song each bird
hath sung.

Still the sea-birds called, where once the city stood.

Where are the towers that crowned thee, high-throned
between thy waters?

Thy beauty, Dorian Corinth, thy fame of ancient days?
Thy temples of the Blessed, thy palaces, thy daughters
Far-sprung from ancient Sisyphus, thy myriad-trodden
ways?

Not a trace, not a trace, unhappy, hast thou left behind
in falling—

All has been seized and ravened by the wild throat
of war:

We only, Ocean's children, still hover calling, calling,
The sea-mews of thy sorrows, along thy lonely shore.

And now the last child of the Greek genius was born, of partly oriental parentage—the prose-romance, which was to influence those romances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which have in their turn bequeathed us the word “romantic”. These Greek productions of the second and third centuries of the Empire are romantic indeed; dream-dramas of an imagination that takes refuge from reality in a vague world with little historical colouring to date it. Their general character is best summarized in Johnson’s epitome of the romantic drama of his own day—so little does the essential recipe of popular “romance” vary through the centuries: “To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered.” To-day no one reads them, hardly—let alone learns them by heart like the young Racine in his boyish defiance of the Puritanism of Port-Royal; but we still remember the Hero and Leander of Musaeus, whose verse romance is almost the farewell of Greek poetry.

There is much, then, that is “Romantic” in classical Greek literature: yet it would be easy to exaggerate. Homer is never unreal as Spenser is; Aeschylus never outrages common sense or common taste like Marlowe. Previous to the Greek novels of the decadence, the Greek dithyramb seems to have gone deepest in intoxication; and was rewarded with the proverbial phrase “silly as

a dithyramb". Perhaps that is why hardly any of them have survived. But, in general, the lasting triumph of Greek literature seems to me largely due to its restraint in this as in other things—its balance between Classicism, Realism, and Romanticism, sense and sensibility, fact and fantasy, dryness and ecstasy.

Rome is on the whole more Classical. Characteristic is Livy's definition of a Roman gentleman—"haud minus libertatis alienae quam suae dignitatis memor". Livy does not say: "dignitatis alienae...suae libertatis." For a man's self, dignity comes before freedom. And yet, there is a touch of the Romantic spirit also in this historian who turns, like Malory, from the corruption of his own day to the knightly virtues of a simpler past; and falls too much in love with that picture to be always faithful to fact. Tacitus, again, can be Romantic like Michelet, as his vision flits from province to province of the Empire at whose gate the barbarians are already hammering with the Middle Ages in their train; or idealizes, with a touch of Rousseau, the noble savagery of Germany. There is Romance in Ovid with his love-lorn heroines and his tales of wonder, though Ovid is really too sly and wakeful a wit to lapse into the true Romantic dream; in Virgil, with his Messianic broodings and his passionate Dido; in Catullus, the Roman Burns; in Propertius, the Roman Rossetti, whose cloudy colours are so far, already, from the sharp flame-tongues of Sappho. It is very typical, this difference between the Greek poetess and the two Romans. Sappho may write with "heart of madness"; but her hand does not shake, her tongue falter, nor her vision lose its clarity, even when she details with the nakedness of a medical dictionary, yet the grace

of a perfect utterance, the symptoms of physical passion—its stammering and quivering and hammering in her ears. In the days when his own love was still young, happy and unspoiled, Catullus translated this poem by the poetess of Lesbos for his "Lesbia"; then, when the time of rancour and disillusion followed, he wrote another poem of parting malediction in the same metre, but this time with words of his own. And now at once we are in a more Romantic world. His wounded imagination breaks away to wander through the wide provinces of the Empire, from far Arabia to

The Gallic Rhine and Britain, Isle of Dread
And Last of Lands.

Here, and in the brutal realism of his farewell curse, or the sob of his last likening of his love to a flower uprooted, like Burns's daisy, by the plough, we seem to have already travelled half-way from the clear peaks of the Aegean to the Romantic mists of Ayr. Sappho too, indeed, speaks in a fragment of the purple hyacinth that the 'shepherds' feet trample unregarding on the hills: but that is in a chorus where young men are picturing the wasted life of the maid unwed. It was Catullus who transferred the flower to his own wasted love with a self-pity that I suspect Sappho's pride would have refused. In the same way the flawless marble relief of her vision of Aphrodite remains far removed from the sombre Rembrandtesque shadows of that night-piece, *Cynthia's Ghost*, by Propertius, whose gloom recalls the race that has filled its tombs in Tuscany with frescoed nightmares nearer to Udolpho than to Athens.

More Romantic still is the picaresque novel of the African Apuleius under the Antonines—that strange

figure who lectured on Plato, yet believed in magic and was himself impeached for having bewitched his own wife to marry him. The story of Cupid and Psyche told in his *Golden Ass*¹ by an old hag in a robbers' den looks back to the fairy folklore of Cinderella and forward to the mediaeval allegory, to the idealism of the *Vita Nuova*, to the charm of *Aucassin and Nicolette*, to the *Odes* of Keats, to the *Earthly Paradise* of Morris. Here Apulcius ventures further out of the realm of real life into fabulous fantasy than Homer had ever dared. Not only can his animals talk, like the horse of Achilles; even a tower recites most serviceable instructions for travel in the Netherworld. Aeolus had shut the winds in a bag; on the analogy of bellows, that was quite imaginable; but here, far more mysteriously, Proserpine breathes her own Beauty into a box for Psyche, the soul—and when the box is opened that Beauty is the sleep of Death. And yet, lovely as the story is, with the Classical sense of reality has faded also the Classical grasp of character.

But these things remain only half-Romantic—still self-possessed rather than possessed—compared with what seems to me really the first chant, the prologue, of the Middle Ages—that *Pervigilium Veneris*, *The Vigil of Venus*, probably of the fourth century A.D., which Walter Pater has interwoven with his own romance of *Marius the Epicurean*.

Cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet:
 Ver novum, ver iam canorum, ver renatus orbis est;
 Vere concordant amores, vere nubunt alites,
 Et nemo comam resolvit de maritis imbribus.
 Cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet.

¹ It is significant that Charles Nodier, the French Romantic, had a boundless admiration for the book and imitated it.

Cras amorum copulatrix inter umbras arborum
Implicat casas virentes de flagello myrteo;
Cras canoris feriatos ducit in silvis choros;
Cras Dione iura dicit fulta sublimi throno.
Cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet.

Loveless hearts shall love to-morrow, hearts that have
loved shall love again.

Spring is young, and spring is singing, spring is life where
death had lain.

Spring is time of true love's knitting, in the spring the
birds are wed,

Under the rain of her lord's blessing the forest waves her
leafy head.

Loveless hearts shall love to-morrow, hearts that have
loved shall love again.

In the shadow of the woodland she that binds all true
hearts' vows,

She shall build them bowers to-morrow of her own green
myrtle boughs;

Yea, to-morrow shall Diōne dance them down the
greenwood shaw

And Love's Lady high-enthronèd on her lovers lay her law.

Loveless hearts shall love to-morrow, hearts that have
loved shall love once more.

Here in this pagan *Song of Songs* is already the mediaeval passion for passion, with the lilt of the mediaeval lyric. Already the birds are making ready for St Valentine. Botticelli himself never painted a lovelier Spring, nor a lovelier Venus; and yet the same wistful sorrow haunts this spring-song of the old world's autumn as over-shadows the dreamy faces on his canvases. For Pan is dying. Behind the desperate passion of these leaping trochees, wilder than anything in Latin before them except the Oriental *Atys* of Catullus, thuds the tramp of the barbarians along the roads to Rome, where men

are turning away from the full-flushed Mother of Eros to the Virgin Mother of Christ.

This poem, indeed, rises like a watershed between two worlds. Behind falls the long straight Roman Way; in front stretch the cloudy valleys of the Middle Ages with, far off, the winding lanes of the Wandering Scholars and the meadows of England where the cuckoo sings for summer and "Lenten ys come with Love to tounne". Here already we can catch an echo of the distant melodies of Benedictbeuern, eight hundred years away.

Estivant nunc Dryades
 Colle sub umbroso.
 Prodeunt Orcades
 Coetu glorioso.
 Satyrorum concio
 Psallit cum tripudio
 Tempe per amena:
 His alludens concinit,
 Cum iucundi meminit
 Veris, filomena.

Down the woods the Dryades
 Wander now a-maying:
 Now the proud Orciades
 High on hills are straying.
 Through the happy valleys green
 Harping, singing, now is seen
 Many a goatish dancer:
 While in gladness for the spring
 Philomena carolling
 Makes them merry answer.

Why is it that the Middle Ages have seemed so long the native soil of Romance, the Well at the World's End where it rises, the Wood beyond the World where it runs wild? There have already been many touches

of Romance in the Classics; yet these keep some sense of incongruity about them. They surprise, like strange plants sown by some wandering bird or wind in fields far from their home; such as that Druid mistletoe, to which Virgil compares his Golden Bough, the mystic passport to another world than ours:

Quale solet silvis brumai frigore viscum
Fronde virere nova, quod non sua seminat arbos
Et croceo fetu teretis circumdare truncos.

As in December's frost the mistletoe
Puts forth new shoots upon an alien tree,
Wreathing with saffron fruit its columned bole.

So Romance blooms only sparsely here and there in the oak-groves of Antiquity; but in the Middle Ages it is everywhere, like the mistletoe in orchards of Normandy. Romance is young. "You Greeks are ever children", said the Egyptian priest; but the Middle Ages are more childlike still. Romance is an uncritical love of wonders; and the Middle Ages believed nearly everything they heard and everything they read. All books were Gospel-true; it was long yet to the day when Francis Bacon was to set the fashion of regularly testing theory by experiment. He died of the cold he caught stuffing a fowl with snow; of that new attitude our modern world was born. But the mediaeval mind is content to read in Pliny that the traveller who takes a myrtle-staff will never feel tired—how interesting!—copy it out. Test it?—why? Pliny's word is good enough. Albertus Magnus says a woman will confess all her secrets, if a frog's tongue is laid on her heart as she sleeps; but few men stirred out to catch a frog. Doubt was only possible if the authority was *not* sufficiently antique.

Topsell judiciously suspends judgement on the power of virgins to ensnare unicorns, because he can find "no *elder* authority than Tzetzes, who did not live *above* five hundred years ago". No wonder, then, they could believe anything. The Abbot Richalm of Schöntal in the fourteenth century warns us that even flea-bites are not flea-bites—they are really the work of devils. Edward II can write to the Pope asking if without sin he may use an ointment that gives courage (he was to need it, poor soul). And Hubert de Burgh can be solemnly accused of having abstracted from the royal treasury a ring that made the wearer invincible, and sent it to Llewelyn. It is a happy touch in *The Cloister and the Hearth* when a character, asked the meaning of a crowd in the street, replies: "Ye born fool! it's only a miracle!" Similarly, Luther, wakened by a noise in the night, turns over and goes to sleep again—it is *only* the Devil.

It is interesting to find even a mediaeval writer drawing the line occasionally, like the author of *Ider*¹—

Tels diz n'a fors savor de songe,
Tant en acreissent les paroles;
Mes jo n'ai cure d'iperboles:
Yperbole est chose non voire,
Qui ne fu et n'est a croire,
C'en est la difinicion:
Mes tant di de cest paveillon
Qu'il n'en a nul soz ciel qu'il vaille.

"There are some stories like dreams, so exaggerated are they; but I have no use for hyperboles. 'Hyperbole' is a thing that never was, and is past belief—that is its definition. But I *will* say for this pavilion I am de-

¹ Quoted by W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance* (1897), p. 379.

scribing, that there is not its like under the sun." But the builders of Seville Cathedral had no such fear of "hyperbole": "It shall be so great", they resolved, "that posterity shall think us mad." There speaks true Romance.

No doubt Greece and Rome had their superstitions. An eclipse of the moon nearly ruined Greece in the Persian War, and did ruin Athens before Syracuse. Plato, again, tells us a legend of an invisible ring. But Plato puts it on the finger of a legendary Oriental in a tale avowedly mythical. We cannot conceive Cleon asking Delphi if he would be tortured in Hades for fortifying his poor nerves with magic ointment. A Universe where even fleas are devils is less comfortable than ours; but this anarchy of unseen wills was far more dramatically personal than our mechanic conception of the scientific uniformity behind all the world's variety, of the few simple laws behind all its transformations. For mediaeval man, always anything might happen. We still talk of the wonders of Nature; but Nature has become like a mass of stage machinery, with not a soul on the boards. "I beseech you, my brethren," once cried a Bampton lecturer, "by the mercies of Christ, that you hold fast the integrity of your anthropomorphism." The Greek with nymph and faun, the mediaeval mind with fay and goblin, had sources of imaginative excitement that have since run dry. There may be substitutes; but it is cant to pretend that Science has not left life less dramatic. The ring of Saturn is not the ring of Venus.

This abeyance of the critical faculty, of the sense of reality, seems, then, one source of the romance of the Middle Ages. It left men's imaginations vague, vast,

and free. They believed what they read, and what they believed, they embroidered. But what did they read? Some of the classics; but also more unrestrained works such as the Bible and the lives of the Saints (followed later by the influence of Arabia). So that now Jordan flowed into Tiber, with all the Eastern imagination and imagery of the Old Testament, the miracles of Moses, the ecstasies of the *Song of Solomon*. "Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim; thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon that looketh towards Damascus." "Longinus" had admired the noble bareness of *Genesis*—"God said, Let there be light: and there was light"; but how he would have shuddered at this cascade of similes, such as even Aeschylus never dreamt of! The Bible has contributed its share, not merely by stories like those of Rachel, Ruth, and Esther, but by its whole style and atmosphere, to European Romantic literature. For the very same reason it was typical that in the age of neo-Classicism the Maréchale de Luxembourg should lament, opening the sacred text, that the Holy Spirit should have had "si peu de goût", or that Voltaire should be content to render those other words of the *Song of Solomon*: "His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set" by the bald "Un feu pur est dans ses yeux".¹ Here lies in little the whole

¹ An English eighteenth-century poet can treat the Bible less baldly but worse: in the hands of Francis Fawkes (1761), Jaël's "butter in a lordly dish" (symbol of the simple milk of human kindness and of the deference of hospitality in grim contrast with the treachery behind) becomes—

He ask'd refreshment from the limpid wave:
The milky beverage to the chief she gave.

How rancid it has turned!

difference between the Romantic and the neo-Classic spirit—the refusal of the second to dream. “Je vais droit au fait—c’est ma devise”, said Voltaire; it was his motto in poetry also. “Un feu pur est dans ses yeux”—they are eyes to discern with, but not to gaze in.

Further, if the Middle Ages were made even more imaginative by what they read, they also made what they read more imaginative. Their translations are new creations. Their wondering child-like naïveté transforms everything they touch; as when Caxton with reckless inaccuracy—how be accurate in a dream?—sets his hand to Ovid. Here he is the exact reverse of Voltaire with the *Song of Songs*. The easy insolent ease of the frivolous courtier of Augustus is now replaced by the struggling accents of a child construing; and yet what new seriousness, what new wonder and mystery gather round us, as Caxton tiptoes, for example, into that favourite resort of Romantic dreamers, the House of Sleep!—“The hows of this gode was in a most still place of the worlde in the bottom of the kreves of a mountayne, where as the sonne never shyneth, where as it seemeth alway is betwyn day and nyght. There slepeth this god. Ther is neyther noyse ne lyghte may dystrowble hys reste. There resowneth nothyng but a swete wynd amonge rosyers. And a lytil broke of water soundeth, whych renneth and murmureth upon the gravell that it resowneth forto gyve appetyte to sleep.”

The glamour does not lie merely in the quaint spelling; and yet even this adds to it—not simply by being old. A whole psychological difference has developed between us whose careful proof-readers are up in arms if we

spell the same word differently a hundred pages apart, and these half-conscious forefathers of ours who did not centre their minds on such trivialities, quite content, even as late as Elizabeth, to spell Sir Thomas More's surname three ways in one line. Is our anxious alertness wholly gain? It would have seemed slavish pedantry to men that could rebel even against the laws of grammar; like the Emperor Sigismund, who pronounced that a Holy Roman Emperor was above it; or Pope Gregory the Great who wrote: "Caus servare contemno quia indignum vehementer existimo ut verba coelistis oraculi restringam sub regulis Donati".

But the Parnassus of mediaeval romance, like that of the Romantic Revival, has twin summits. If this freedom of fantasy is one, freedom of passion is the other. Here too a verse of the *Song of Songs* will serve for text. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Set beside this the sober wisdom of Homer:

Of all things cometh surfeit, even of love and sleep,
Of sweet song and of dances that faultless measure keep.

For Homer, Passion is not life's crown; only one bright ring on its fair finger, where shine others no less bright. Not that he belittles the wedding-ring. It is enough to remember Andromache, and Penelope, and Odysseus' praise of marriage to Nausicaa in her queenly girlhood, as he blesses her at their final farewell. Nor does Homer despise physical passion—it too is the gift of a goddess, lovely and terrible. Troy is destroyed for one woman, the Greek host nearly ruined for another, and Ithaca for

a third. All the same, for Homeric wisdom Love is not a matter for mystic rhapsodies. Nothing is. The later ages of Pericles and Demosthenes were still less in love with love. Plato believed in woman's education; but not in chivalry. "The characters in tragedy", remarks Aristotle in his cold, even voice, "should be good. Even a woman, or a slave, *may* be good." We are not far here from the Orient and the seraglio.

Things were otherwise with the women of the Feudal Age, who could even inherit fiefs themselves; a system that helped to cost the Franks their hold on mediaeval Greece. On the other hand women, if sisters to the Virgin, were daughters of Eve and vessels of sin. And yet even this sense of guilt helped still more to dramatize passion. To the pagan, love the "bitter-sweet" might bring heart-ache, rarely heart-break; but for the Christian it might mean a soul writhing in everlasting flame. "Why is the sun red at sunset?" "Because he goeth towards Hell." Two of the most dramatic figures of the mediaeval imagination largely owe their intensity to this lurid light from the Christian underworld—Faust¹ and Don Juan. Against that red background loved Abelard and Héloïse, Henry Plantagenet and Rosamund Clifford, Paolo and Francesca, Tristram and Iseult, Lancelot and Guenevere. When Alexander came to Anchialus, he read on the statue of the Assyrian king: "Sardanapalus built Anchialus and Tarsus on the

¹ How many know that imaginative touch in the old Faust-legend, unused by Marlowe or Goethe, which tells how that doomed body, as it lay on its bier, turned of itself face downwards from the wrath of God? Five times it was laid on its back; five times it was found with its forehead to the earth; and so left at last. (J. Gast, *Convivialium Sermonum Liber II*, 1544.) Such a fantasy of terror is hardly to be found in all paganism.

same day; but thou, stranger, eat, drink and make love; all else is not worth—that!" To the Greek this was always a possible view even if, like Alexander, he did not follow its Epicureanism. But when Tannhäuser turned to the hollow mountain of pagan love, it seemed a sin too terrible for Rome itself to absolve.

Heaven, too, added its force, as well as Hell, to this idealizing of passion. Beside Francesca stands Beatrice. For the muddled mediaeval mind could never really decide whether passion were sin or salvation. "While she lived, she was a true lover," writes Malory of Guenevere, "and *therefore* she had a good end." It was not to her husband she was true; but no matter—like the Magdalene, *multum amavit*. Malory did not think it out; he likewise had loved her too well.

Here, then, in the Middle Ages we have reached a new stage in the growth of Romanticism. It is no longer simply the passionate or fantastic dreaming of a roving imagination that has shaken off the too insistent claims of Society or Reality. Society itself has now grown Romantic; it has built up a new creed and a new code of conduct. "True lovers come to good ends." Such a faith is a foreshadowing of the beliefs about the sanctity of all passion, the divine origin of all love, that were to lead to such extravagances in the days of Rousseau and George Sand. The madness of the imagination has now begun to acquire a method; the blind pagan Cupid to found an established Church. *L'amour courtois* develops an elaborate convention; its very first article is that it cannot exist between wife and husband, only between wife and lover. Again, under the more familiar shape of chivalry, mediaeval romance has bequeathed to us

standards of action not yet wholly dead. From the race of knights-errant, crossed with the brigand, the noble savage, and the rebellious Satan, the pedigree of Romantic heroes descends, through the fairy-world of Tasso and Spenser and the over-heroic stage of Dryden, to the gloomy supermen or misanthropes of Byron and Monk Lewis, Anne Radcliffe and Emily Brontë.

There is no more charming incarnation of these mediaeval ideas than Aucassin; and there could hardly be a clearer contrast than his story offers with the Greek world, even at its most Romantic. Like Achilles, Aucassin refuses to fight because the woman he loves is taken away. But Homer hardly tells us how Briseis looked, or how Achilles felt for her. She remains in his hands a dazzling shadow—"fair-cheeked", "like golden Aphrodite"; it was mediaeval Romance that first woke her to real life, two thousand years later, under the too famous name of Cressida. Even the beauty of Helen herself is never described by the Greek poet. How vividly, by contrast, Nicolette looks out of her prison-window in Beaucaire, or clambers down from it by her rope of sheets and towels! "She had fair hair with little curls, and her eyes blue-grey and laughing, and her face well-featured, and her nose high and well set, and her lips redder than cherry or rose in summertime, and her teeth white and little; and her breasts were hard, lifting her robe as if they had been two walnuts; and so slim she was from flank to flank that you might have clasped her within your two hands; and the daisy-flowers broken by her toes, as they fell across the arch of her foot, were right black against her feet and legs—so white was the maid." This Nicolette is the very ecstasy of a lover's dream.

Homer, again, never leaves Achilles heart-broken for his Briseis. Pride and anger are his ruling passions, not love; and Patroclus meant more to him than a hundred women. So with Menelaus and Helen. Round her the whole war is fought; but again it is a point of honour more than love. Whereas Aucassin is wholly besotted with the thought of Nicolette, whom his father has refused him. For one promised kiss he finally consents to take the field. But he is still lost in dreams of her, as he rides into the battle; he is taken prisoner and led off to death; only then does he suddenly awake and hew his captors down. Homer's audience would have thought this an excessively moon-struck young man.

"What use", says Hector to himself, as he sees Achilles advancing like death across the Trojan plain, "what use for me to speak with him?—not for us such love-talk as the whispers of youth and maid!" This one fleeting, bitter glimpse of young romance Homer gives us, like a last ray of sunlight before darkness closes on the plain of Troy; but he never brings youth and maid to whisper their love before us, like the author of *Aucassin*:

"Yet I would rather die, than know you had lain in another man's bed than mine."

"Ai," said she, "I do not believe you love me so much as you say: but I love you better than you love me."

"Nay," said Aucassin, "fair, sweet friend! It may not be that you should love me as I you. Women cannot love man as man loves woman. For woman's love is in her eye, and the tip of her breast, and the tip of her toe; but man's love is planted in his heart within, and cannot out."

Charming, foolish metaphysics—part meaningless, part untrue—the perfect fantasy of lovers. It is as prettily unreal as the instant healing of Aucassin's dislocated

shoulder by the white fingers of Nicolette—"for so God willed, who loveth lovers". "All the world", the saying still goes, "loves a lover"; certainly this mediaeval world did so; and remade even its God in its own image.

And yet, elsewhere in this romance, there appears a very different theology: "'If you made her your paramour...all the days of Eternity your soul would lie in Hell—into Paradise you would come never.' 'In Paradise what have I to do? I care not to come there, if I can have Nicolette, my sweet friend that I love so.'"

There is no need to quote the rest—the most famous passage in the whole story—with its vision of old priests and cripples and beggars hobbling heavenward, while the good knights and the ladies with their lovers two or three, the minstrels and the poets, the gold and silver sweep gaily down to hell. For a moment Aucassin stands there defiant on the mountain-top, with Satan, with Prometheus, and with Manfred. So native is rebellion to Romance. God and Mother Church provide a father-substitute, a super-ego, to rebel against. Homer's Odysseus too passes the gate of Hell; but in sorrowful obedience, not in defiance. Greek wisdom knew too well that, however brave our words, it is vain work for mortals to battle with the gods.

Again, the mediaeval artist, more childish, shows far less feeling than the Greek for unity of tone. There is, indeed, enough comic relief in Homer to shock the neo-Classics badly—things like the burlesque life on Olympus, or Irus the beggar, or Ajax slipping into the offal. But there is never anything fantastic enough to endanger the seriousness of the whole; whereas when Aucassin comes to the land of Torelore (enchanting name), we

seem suddenly translated from Spenser to Rabelais or Lewis Carroll, from the *Iliad* to the *Battle of Frogs and Mice*. Torelore is at war, its queen at the front, its king in bed. Why? Because the queen has just had a child. Aucassin, outraged, cudgels the monarch out of bed; together they ride to the war and find a battle raging, the air darkened with a barrage of eggs and roast crab-apples, fresh cheeses and giant mushrooms. Aucassin at once starts hewing the enemy down; but the king cries "Hold!" It is not at all the custom of Torelore that in battles people should be killed!

In Homer, again, the realism of his humbler folk is never in danger of making ridiculous the heroic side of his story. Thersites¹ is speedily silenced; the swineherd of Odysseus remains "the god-like swineherd", himself a king's son. But in *Aucassin* there suddenly appears a grotesque peasant figure with the Sancho-Panzan common sense of a Shakespearcan fool. "He had a great shock-head, blacker than coal, and more than a palm's breadth between his eyes; great cheeks and a huge flat nose and great gaping nostrils and blubber-lips redder than a beef-steak and great ugly yellow teeth." He asks Aucassin why he is weeping. "For a fair white greyhound" he has lost, is Aucassin's symbolic reply. "Listen to him!" exclaims the outraged peasant, "crying for a stinking hound! Foul befall him who ever respects you again!" The poor villein has himself lost an ox and in his destitution his old mother has had the very mattress dragged from under her. Here is something real to cry for. "Love does not vex the man that begs

¹ And even Thersites was too realistically low for the Renaissance critic Vida (*Poetica*, II, 179-90).

his bread"—Euripides, too, had said it. But no Athenian ever embodied that truth in so grotesque, yet vivid a shape as this. And yet the romance survives this proletarian realism; the love of Nicolette does not become absurd; just as Rosalind is not extinguished by Touchstone. The Greeks staged a burlesque after each tragic trilogy: but they did not mix things with this Romantic insouciance of the mediaeval mind.

If Aucassin is the perfect lover of Romance, Lancelot is its perfect knight. This sterner ideal rings out immortally in that lament of Sir Ector over Lancelot, which recalls, far off, the lamentations in Homer over Hector dead: "Ah Launcelot," he said, "thou were head of all Christian knights, and now I dare say, said Sir Ector, thou Sir Launcelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."

Here Romantic chivalry cries its last challenge in the face of death: the human spirit has framed few prouder endings. Though there is perhaps more of the essence of Romance in sentences elsewhere in Malory, such as "Then, as they rode, they heard by them a great horse grimly neigh and then were they ware of a knight that

lay all armed under an apple-tree"; or "'Fair fellow,' said Sir Ector, 'knowest thou in this country any adventures that be here nigh hand?'" If only he could always have written so! But, like most of his age, Malory lacks sense of form. He has made a strange shapeless muddle of his story, as of his ideas; so that it remains hard, I think, to understand how T. E. Lawrence could take the *Morte d'Arthur* as his one book into the wastes of Arabia; and pronounce, after translating the *Odyssey*, that it was a poorish poem after all. The *Odyssey* seems to me, on the contrary, a standing proof of the superiority of work that, with all its Romantic dreaming, yet maintains to the end Classic sanity and self-control.

But the *Morte d'Arthur* is the testament of a dying age. Like his Sir Bedivere, Malory is left sighing in his solitude for a world of chivalry that has already passed away: a fifteenth-century Don Quixote, watching indignantly while round him the Pastons and their like are laying the new foundations of an England of shopkeepers; a stone crusader, stark in his armour on his grey tomb, amid the grosser, more vital figures of Breughel's world. For now above the ashes of the fair dames of yesteryear, of Elaine and Iseult and Ettarre, François Villon is already chanting, with a leer at all Romance:

Folles amours font les gens bestes:
Salmon en ydolatria,
Samson en perdit ses lunettes.
Bien est eureux qui riens n'y a.

Follies of love leave an addled pate,
Love bowed to idols Solomon's wit,
Samson, he lost his eyes that gate,
Lucky are they that are quit of it.

And in the dust gathering on Malory's monument Ascham was soon to scrawl that characteristic libel of Renaissance hatred for the Middle Ages—that the painter of Lancelot and Galahad cared only for “open manslaughter and bold bawdry”. For a moment the pedant of the Reformation seems to echo the poet of Catholicism: “Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse”.

Sometimes, it is true, the Renaissance tried to combine the old Romance with the new Classics. With Ronsard and Shakespeare it triumphed. With others the attempt was less happy. The Romantic elements in ancient literature had been, in the main, either dreams of far fairylands and pastoral Arcadias or else the heart's cry of natural passion. But these Renaissance attempts show the self-consciousness that besets all literary revivals: and as the essence of Romanticism is that it should draw freely on the fantasies that rise from half-conscious dreaming, any self-conscious bookishness proves particularly deadly to it. This wild hyacinth withers in a *parterre* or a vase. Already in antiquity, when Apollonius Rhodius or Propertius become antiquarians, they become bores; it is their scenes of passion alone that live. In Tasso, or Spenser, or Sidney's *Arcadia* there is a sickly taint of the factitious, of pastiche. These writers fall between two worlds, between two periods. Spenser is a witching painter, in the style of Claude Lorraine; but he can neither tell a tale nor create a character. Even Ariosto, who shields himself behind a mocker's grin, with his interminable necromancers and magic steeds gives too much the impression of a grown man in a green garden playing at bears. And even in Shakespeare's *Tempest* Prospero's wand, I feel, has already

cracked a little before he flings it from him; his magic volume grown a little dog-eared, before he closes it for ever. Prospero is too close a cousin to Polonius, without seeming aware of the relationship; and his daughter remains a pretty poppet, beginning to fade into a Spenserian decline. In Beaumont and Fletcher this malady of unreality has gone further; in the prose romances of the seventeenth century it grows incurable; the Heroic Drama of the Restoration is its raucous death-rattle. How was it still possible after *Don Quixote* to write *Don Sebastian*!

The ancient world had been, at its height, acutely self-critical. "Know Thyself"—"Nothing Too Much"—so spoke the temple at its central Delphi. Apollo's priestess might rave; but not Apollo. Even the raving priestess raved in hexameters. The Middle Ages had swung away into uncritical credulity. Now with neo-Classicism self-consciousness returns. But it returns in excess. "Metaphysical poetry" is an extraordinary example of leaping from one extreme to its opposite—from honey to cayenne pepper. Men had grown weary of Spenser beautifully dreaming in his House of Sleep, in the bed where Ovid and Caxton had already lain—

Here Sleep's House by famous Ariosto,
By silver-tongued Ovid and many moe—
Perhaps by golden-mouthed Spenser too, pardie—
Which builded was some dozen stories high,
I had repaired, but that it was so rotten
As Sleep awaked by rats from thence was gotten.¹

Donne wanted no high-astounding stories; he and his disciples preferred a laboratory on the ground-floor—

¹ Once attributed to Donne; probably by Sir John Roe.

sometimes poisonous, often stuffy, and as somnolent, very often, to the modern visitor as ever the House of Sleep. But these new intellectuals proved, as so often, not very intelligent. For it is as futile, and as fatal, to let the analysing intellect play cat's cradle with the feelings, as to let the feelings besot the intellect. Donne himself has passions strong enough to survive, sometimes, even his own finicking treatment. The cat's cradle bursts into flame. But his followers are mostly caught, like poor flies, in their own tangled cobwebs. "Things divorced in Nature," as old Fuller says in that Metaphysical prose of his, so much more human than most Metaphysical verse, "are married in Fancy as in a lawless place". But, when the divorce in Nature is so absolute, Fancy seldom makes a very happy marriage; or a very fruitful one.

The same thing had happened before, in antiquity. After Spenser, Donne; after Sophocles, Lycophron; after Virgil, Seneca. The chamber-tragedies of that provincial Spaniard under the red disillusion of the Empire had likewise been mere verbal bull-fights. His arena is strewn with as many disembowelled hacks as possible—the characters; and the pleasure, apart from simple sadism, consists in watching the infinite deftness with which the poet wields those stabbing darts, that flashing sword, of indefatigable epigram.

But literary toreadors are mostly short-lived. Few things rust faster than the edge of self-conscious cleverness. Marvell's *Coy Mistress*, indeed, will be lovely "till the Conversion of the Jews"; Donne's *Extasie* is ecstatic still; but his *Flea* is little worth hunting, except for those who like to see such things perform. Catullus

writes, still Classically clear even in his Romantic frenzy:

Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris,
Nescio. Sed fieri sentio, et excrucior.

I hate, yet love her. If you ask me why,
I know not. But 'tis truth; and agony.

But Donne would have pretended to know; and have told us in fifty lines of conceits, mediocre in wit, callous in feeling, and totally indifferent to truth. Cynicism should at least be terse; like La Rochefoucauld or Chamfort. Yet Donne remains a great poet. More typical of his school than its master is Cowley, for a few years one of the world's supreme writers; and then, a few years later—"Who reads Cowley?"

Pretty in amber to observe the forms
Of hairs or straws or dirt or grubs or worms!
The things we know are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the devil they got there.

But those with lives of their own to lead will not waste overlong in wondering. It was, indeed, a European disease of the time. In Italy Marini gave his name to it, and even Dante Alighieri was thought worthy to be praised in puns—

Ben sull' *ali liggier* tre mondi canta.

The same epidemic raged in France; "la pointe" appeared like a smallpox on the face of everything.

Un héros sur la scène eut soin de s'en parer,
Et sans pointe un amant n'osa plus soupirer.

But here too, adds Boileau (alas, too optimistically):

La raison outragée enfin ouvrit les yeux,
La chassa pour jamais des discours sérieux.

Mediaeval romance had come to seem literature for children; Metaphysical poetry, apart from a few masterpieces, was an interlude of poetry for coxcombs; it was next replaced by neo-Classic poetry—poetry for gentlemen. You may still be conscious of your wit; but it is bad manners to parade it, and bad sense to waste it on quibbles. And so under Louis XIV and Queen Anne came the great advance of trying to be intelligent rather than clever. It was an honest attitude to reality; a politer attitude to society. But, in a way, it cramped the preconscious side of the mind more tightly than anything before. The Metaphysical brain, as we see it in Fuller or Sir Thomas Browne, had still left loopholes for spontaneous whimsy, fancy, and caprice: the now tightened censorship of the “reality-principle” repressed most of these. The typical eighteenth-century intellectual tried far more to “know himself”; he tried to know himself too much; he failed to guess, even, how much there was he could not know. And in literature he let his society-conscience make a coward of him.

In fact, “gentlemen” have often a narrow taste in things imaginative; sometimes they have none. They seldom wrote as badly as the Metaphysicals; they seldom wrote as well. Poetry came in danger of dying, not indeed of politeness, but of polish. Yet the art of prose, less daemonic, now flourished; so did the art of life. Indeed, if it is asked what is the place in life, as well as letters, of Romance, one cannot do better than contrast the eighteenth century with the age that preceded it and the age that followed. And, as typical, it is worth considering men’s change in attitude towards two of the deepest things in life—love and death.

By 1700 the age of Almanzors is over. The plot of *Le Cid*, like that of *Maud*, had turned on the tragic conflict between love and kinship. The hero kills the father, or the brother, of his mistress; the end is nearly death in the one case, is madness in the other. In the eighteenth-century *Gil Blas* this situation of a murdered brother recurs; the lady is still passionately romantic—for we are in Spain; but how coolly realistic is the advice Don Raphaël now gives her distracted lover!—"Il faut oublier cette jeune dame. . . . Vous trouverez sans doute quelque jeune personne qui fera sur vous la même impression, et dont vous n'aurez pas tué le frère." *Le Cid*, I feel, finds a deadlier opponent here in Lesage than ever in the father of his Chimène.

"Il faut leur apprendre", says Madame de Maintenon, of young girls, "à aimer raisonnablement, comme à faire toutes choses." Classic utterance! Horace had laughed long since, as the God of Love has always laughed, at such efforts to methodize a madness. And yet Madame de Maintenon was not altogether mad either. Just as swooning and weeping have gone in and out of fashion, so there are ages when the convention is for lovers to be far madder than in others; and the convention is extremely potent. Men may take as their pattern Aeneas leaving Dido for duty, or Titus Bérénice; or they may learn to prefer an Antony and "All for Love; or the World Well Lost". What a contrast, again, between this ideal of "loving reasonably" and the *Lettres d'une Religieuse Portugaise* (1669) with their romantic passion for passion, whatever its misery: "Je suis ravie d'avoir fait tout ce que j'ay fait pour vous contre toute sorte de bienséance: je ne mets plus mon honneur, et ma

religion, qu'à vous aimer éperduement toute ma vie"—"je vous remercie dans le fond de mon cœur du désespoir que vous me causez; et je déteste la tranquillité où j'ay vescu avant que je vous connusse." Here is the very tone of Byron (it is too often forgotten that he really *was* a poet)—or of one side of Byron:

 Their breath is agitation, and their life
 A storm whereon they ride to sink at last,
 And yet so nursed and bigoted to strife,
 That should their days, surviving perils past,
 Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast
 With sorrow and supineness, and so die;
 Even as a flame unfed that runs to waste
 With its own flickering, or a sword laid by
 Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously.

Contrast with these the sad disillusion of Mme de Staal-Delaunay (1684-1750): "Toute passion s'éteint dès qu'on voit l'objet tel qu'il est"; or the gay disillusion of Mme d'Esparbès to the young Lauzun (1747-93): "Croyez-moi, mon petit cousin, il ne réussit plus d'être romanesque; cela rend ridicule et voilà tout." So there grew up in eighteenth-century France a school of Epicureans, whose motto in love was "Point de lendemain". Horace Walpole complains that the art of courtship will soon be reduced to the words, "Lie down". And even Buffon could write—"Il n'y a de bon dans l'amour que le physique."

How reason simplifies life! And yet life may refuse to be simplified. But at least, whatever its over-rationalization of love, no age has known better how to die simply and gracefully than this Age of Reason. The seventeenth century had faced death with terror, or bitterness, or the *panache* of Algernon Sidney (1683),

replying to the headsman's question, "Will you rise again? Are you ready, sir?"—"Not till the general Resurrection. Strike on." This is tremendous. And similarly when Romanticism has begun to revive, the emotionalism too returns with Mme Roland's "*O Liberté, que de crimes on commet en ton nom!*"; or Danton's "*Tu montreras ma tête au peuple; elle en vaut la peine!*"; or Mirabeau's vanity, as the cannon boomed over Paris—"Sont-ce déjà les funérailles d'Achille?"; or Nelson's "Kiss me, Hardy".

But the society of the eighteenth century had quitted the stage with a lighter touch than this; like Madame de Pompadour, seeing the priest impatient to be gone—"Un moment, monsieur le curé, nous partirons ensemble"; or Mme du Deffand with her ironic "*Monsieur le curé, je m'accuse d'avoir contrevenu aux dix commandements de Dieu, et d'avoir commis les sept péchés mortels*"; or Chesterfield murmuring, courteous to the end, "Give Dayrolles a chair"; or Adam Smith's calm farewell to his friends—"I believe we must adjourn this meeting to some other place"; or that supreme grace of the Vicomtesse d'Houdetot—"Je me regrette."

Such things, like the music of Handel or Mozart, may make us feel that in some ways, for a small circle, the eighteenth century was the most civilized period there has ever been, with its sense of fact and yet its social grace, its freedom from fanaticism and folly. We owe it more than we know; and we are busy squandering that heritage in the frenzies of this darkening Europe that has so largely exchanged misgovernment by gentlemen for misgovernment by gangsters. There has been written no truer praise of that great period than this

passage by J. L. and Barbara Hammond: "A row of eighteenth-century houses, or a room of normal eighteenth-century furniture, or a characteristic piece of eighteenth-century literature, conveys at once a sense of satisfaction and completeness. The secret of this charm is not to be found in any special beauty or nobility of design or expression, but simply in an exquisite fitness. The eighteenth-century mind was a unity, an order; it was finished and it was simple. All literature and art that really belong to the eighteenth century are the language of a little society of men and women, who moved within one set of ideas; who understood each other; who were not tormented by any anxious or bewildering problems; who lived in comfort and, above all things, in composure. The Classics were their freemasonry."

But it was not a poetic age, though it has its poetry for us:

Comme vous meurtrisiez les cœurs
De vos airs charmants et moqueurs
Et si tristes,
Menuets à peine entendus,
Sanglots légers, rires fondus,
Baisers tristes.¹

Ah, how heart-rendingly disarming
Your melodies; so mocking—charming—
Yet so *triste*:
Minuets that whisper sighing,
Half-heard sobs, low laughs replying,
Sad lips kissed.

Even the robust romanticism of Browning felt it, as he listened to a toccata of Galuppi's, while Casanova's Venice, like a ghostly Venus, rose again before him from her sea. No doubt it is dangerously easy to turn romantic

¹ Fernand Gregh.

about the neo-Classic age itself, as the growing distance purples it. But we can well believe, without romancing, the sincerity of that survivor of the old régime who affirmed to a later generation that life before the Revolution had possessed a grace, a charm, nothing could ever give again. It was the privilege of a few, no doubt; but it was real.

Unfortunately men were trying to be more reasonable than it is reasonable to try to be.¹ In life, their ideal was not ignoble: but it was impossible. And in literature, it is not the best ideal for verse that it should be "as fine as prose".² Like the boy in the story, who was coated all over with gold paint for a pageant, the human spirit stifled. Poetry tended to grow too like this passage from the *Reflections upon Theatrical Expression*³ of 1755: "In *Astonishment* and *Surprise* arising from *Terror* the *left leg* is drawn back to some distance from the other: under the same Affection of the Mind, but resulting from an *unhop'd for Meeting* with a beloved Object, the *right leg* is advanced to some distance before the left. *Impatience* and *Regret* at being detected in an iniquitous Design may be heightened by shuffling of the *Feet* without moving from the *Spot*."

¹ Cf. M. J. Chénier:

C'est le bon sens, la raison qui fait tout—
Vertu, génie, esprit, talent, et goût.
Qu'est la vertu? raison mise en pratique.
Talent? raison produite avec éclat.
Esprit? raison qui finement s'exprime.
Le goût n'est rien qu'un bon sens délicat,
Et le génie est la raison sublime.

² Buffon. Similarly d'Alembert claims it as a triumph of his time that nothing is now said in poetry that is not sensible enough to be said in prose.

³ See F. C. Green's charming *Minuet*, p. 27.

There is indeed little to add to Prior's picture of one besetting malady of his century, the very opposite to the malady of the century that followed it.

Nor Good, nor Bad, nor Fools, nor Wise,
They would not learn, nor could advise;
Without Love, Hatred, Joy, or Fear,
They led—a kind of—as it were:
Nor Wish'd, nor Car'd, nor Laugh'd, nor Cry'd:
And so they liv'd: and so they dy'd.

How significant, behind its banter, is Gray's letter to Nicholls in 1769!—"And so you have a garden of your own and you plant and transplant, and are dirty and amused; are you not ashamed of yourself? Why, I have no such thing, you monster; nor ever shall be either dirty or amused as long as I live."¹ The eighteenth century produced the garden of *Candide*, as its commonsense substitute for the garden of Eden; but it remained, for the most part, too urban, as well as too urbane, to cultivate even gardens very freely. And what a bleak desert their formal walks could grow! "'Tis ridiculous to judge seriously of a puppet-show," writes the disillusioned old age of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. "I have never yet seen anything serious that was not ridiculous," echoes Horace Walpole. "Ah!" repeats Mme du Deffand, who had passed a bored and passionless life only to fall in love, when blind and decrepit, with one who might have been her son, "je le répète sans cesse, il n'y a qu'un malheur, celui d'être né. Quelle cruauté de se marier, tirer des individus du néant! Tout ce qui existe est malheureux, un ange, une huître, peut-être un grain de sable; le néant, le néant voilà ce qui vaut le

¹ See Beer's *Eng. Romanticism in the Eighteenth Cent.*, p. 168.

mieux!" "Quant à moi," echoes Mme de Staal-Delaunay, as spring returns, "je ne m'en soucie plus; je suis si lasse de voir des fleurs et d'en entendre parler, que j'attends avec impatience la neige et le frimas." And he is no isolated figure, that pessimist of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* who had found that the towers of Idlesse, like the gates of Reason, could not bar out the thin ghost of Ennui—

Ne ever utter'd word, save when first shone
The glittering star of eve—"Thank Heaven! the day is done."

Thus the natural Adam began to chafe under these silver chains of good sense and good taste. He longed to dream again. Enthusiasm—what the eighteenth-century peer who survived in Byron derided as "entusy-musy" and Landor, in this respect Byron's spiritual cousin, called "the hot and uncontrolled harlotry of a flaunting and dishevelled enthusiasm"—was, after all, too deep a natural need. It broke out from beneath the foundations of eighteenth-century sanity, as it has broken out again from under the foundations of nineteenth-century science and freedom of thought. First of all, the need to feel and express feeling showed itself in the growth of sentimentalism.

"You must not exhibit your feelings", said the code of *l'honnête homme*. "It is egotistic: *le moi est haïssable*." Thus a gentleman will be amusing; but he will not display his own amusement by a guffaw. Lord Chesterfield tells his son he cannot remember laughing since he had the use of his reason. "Do you never laugh, M. Fontenelle?"—"Non, je ne fais jamais *Ah-ah-ah*." Fontenelle never laughed, nor ran, nor wept; took to sitting on a stool

without a back when he found himself stooping, towards ninety-eight; and died at a hundred, observing calmly—"Je ne sens autre chose qu'une difficulté d'être." But ordinary human nature could not live up to such standards. Men began to feel a chronic "difficulté d'être". Repression bred hysteria. The pocket-handkerchief was raised as the first banner of revolt—cautiously and whimsically at first by Sterne, who drops a single tear, as Recording Angel, to blot out Uncle Toby's oath; then wipes his Maria's streaming eyes; then finally howls aloud through the *Journal to Eliza*.¹ "Check not," says Sir Charles Grandison to the weeping bride, "check not the kindly gush." And after that the deluge. Madame de Francueil, for example, reads Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and weeps all day. An ill-dressed little man enters the room. She divines it to be the author himself; more tears—in which Rousseau partakes. Her husband tries heroically to make a jest; as well strike a match to dry the Atlantic; he too bursts into tears. And so for decades to come. "Tell dear George," writes Lady Granville of Byron's latest work, "that I think *Cain* most wicked, but not without feeling or passion. Parts of it are magnificent and the effect of Granville reading it out aloud to me was that I roared until I could neither hear nor see." A young man meeting Lamartine, so the poet himself relates, feels ill with emotion and sinks choking with tears into a chair. The young Victor Pavie describes meeting Victor Hugo and rushing into his arms—"Ici une lacune d'environ cinq minutes, pendant laquelle

¹ "I thought love had been a joyous thing", quoth my uncle Toby. "'Tis the most serious thing, an' please your Honour, (sometimes) that is in the world." *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and her impulsive sisterhood are already on the way.

je parlai sans me comprendre, sanglotant d'enthousiasme et riant de grosses larmes." It would be interesting to discover at what point in the nineteenth century the waters really receded.

To escape from the other tyranny, of the reality-principle, a number of eighteenth-century poets, as I suggested some years ago¹ and as has been pointed out again by Professor Housman, found it necessary, like the dog in Goldsmith's poem, to run mad. It was not for nothing that the sober Crabbe wrote, with a far-off and doubtless unconscious echo of Sophocles:

The lame, the blind, and—far the happier they!—
The moping idiot and the madman gay.

Gray was content with moping melancholia; but Collins is related to have run whining like a dog about Chichester Cathedral; Chatterton was odd and almost insanely megalomaniac, with madness also in his family; Smart went mad; Clare went mad; Cowper went mad, poor domestic tea-kettle singing thrust upon Hell-fire; Blake was not sane by ordinary standards; Shelley was eccentric; Byron neurotic to a degree; and opium has left its mark on the work of Crabbe, Coleridge and de Quincey. Like ivy on the tree it has strangled, like other parasites that perish in the completeness of their own triumph over their host, the sense of reality and the sense of social fitness were disintegrating at last.

There were two main lines of escape from over-civilized life—back to Nature and the Noble Savage and the secrets of the dreaming soul; or back to the Middle Ages. The former was the first to produce outstanding

¹ *Authors Dead and Living*, p. 93.

results—with Rousseau, that imprisoned vagabond who suddenly thrusts his fist through the window of the stifling *salon* and rushes lacerated and lamenting into the open air. He is, Amiel has pointed out, the ancestor or anticipator of half a dozen later types of writer—of the reveries of Chateaubriand, Senancour, and Wordsworth; of the natural descriptions of Bernardin de St Pierre; of the democratic theorists of the Revolution; of the educational theories of Pestalozzi; of the Romantic novel with its hyperbolic passions; of the nineteenth-century literature of the road and its literature of the Alps.

The other mediaeval escape was, I think, much less important than this return to being natural. Mediaevalism served merely as a favourite fancy-dress for the Romantic soul. But the revival of passionate dreaming went deeper than any revival of the past, though this side of Romanticism was the earlier to become prominent in England and Germany; leading from the Ballad collections of Philips, Ramsay, Percy, Bürger, and Scott; the forgeries of Chatterton and Macpherson; the Gothicism of Strawberry Hill and *Otranto* and *Götz von Berlichingen*, to the belated culmination of mediaeval mania in the France of *Hernani*—that strange world of *châtelaines*, all paled and slimmed (who could imagine a fat *châtelaine*?) and tricked out in *manches à gigot* and *toques à créneaux*, *aumonières* and *bijoux moyen-âge* (coronets or brooches embellished with good greyhounds or little footpages); while about them fluttered strange dandies calling themselves *Jehan* instead of *Jean*, wearing *chapeaux à la Buridan*¹ or *cheveux mérovingiens* or *cheveux*

¹ Readers of Villon will recall this legendary scholar thrown in a sack into the Seine.

en tempête, with Toledo blades by their sides and vast mediaeval pointed toes on their shoes. For if mediaevalism came late to France, it came with a vengeance; and its career there is a typical example of Romantic exaggeration and unreality. Even schoolboys were now dressed as pages with little daggers, soldered fast in the sheath for safety; even infants had cradles *à la Marguerite de Bourgogne*. Young men endeavoured to float companies for reviving the tourney; or formed societies like the so-called *Francs-Archers*, who came to an untimely end after they had brewed a too practically romantic scheme for abducting the *inamorata* of one of them. Even the *Dépôt des Estampes* suddenly found its venerable dust disturbed by an invasion of fashionable ladies, all burning to get their mediaeval costumes correct for the next ball and armed, to the librarian's horror, with authorizations from the minister to take his treasures out on loan. Or at midnight parties, while the flames flared blue in the punch-bowls, suddenly "Enter Yorick"—a skeleton in a Gothic arm-chair, who ventriloquently addressed the company. Some even shouted for Yorick to join in the dance; but Yorick's proprietor was so unromantically sordid as to object, for fear the thing's vertebrae might suffer damage.

But such fashions pass. With Hugo's *Les Burgraves* (1843) the Gothic ramparts of Romanticism collapsed before a battery of yawns. They were never the same again in France. In England, indeed, the Middle Ages could still inspire true poetry, in Pre-Raphaelite hands, as late as the seventies. But even in England little "mediaeval" work has been born and lived in the last fifty years. After a century the vein (only temporarily, no doubt) had exhausted itself.

But, to return, it was the psychological revolution that mattered. The essence of the Revival was that it now became reasonable to be irrational, and conventional to flout convention. The hatches of the Unconscious were once more unbattened. The literary effects of this have already been analysed; in poetry, if not in prose, they were mostly to the good; but its psychological effects were in the long run to prove less admirable. They were indeed to bring Romanticism at last into decadence and derision. It is at this point in its history that the Devil's Advocate must have his say.

"Le cœur le plus serein en apparence", writes Chateaubriand, long before the Unconscious was ever heard of, "ressemble au puits naturel de la Savane Alachua; la surface en paraît calme et pure, mais quand vous regardez au fond du bassin, vous apercevez un large crocodile." We have come to know more about the crocodiles of the Unconscious than Chateaubriand knew; and to believe that its depths contain more crocodiles than one. Many of the Romantics, especially in France, tried making pets of theirs; some got eaten by them; and many of their pages are wet with the crocodiles' tears.

Rousseau withdraws into solitude to dream. His friends are at once outraged. The self-sufficing solitary, Aristotle had said, is either a god or a beast. The eighteenth century was quite sure he must be a beast—"un méchant". "Tout homme réfléchi est méchant", retorted Rousseau. It was into the wilderness, Scott reminded Ballantyne, that Christ Himself went to be tempted of the Devil. We smile. But it must be admitted that the Romantics often sought seclusion not only because they

wanted to dream, not only because they had a passion for Nature, but also because they had a passion for themselves. And there, like a Upas tree in a wilderness, that passion grew unchecked.

I have called Romanticism a revolt of the Unconscious. One of the stages infants pass through, according to Freudian theory, is that of being in love with themselves. But of this infantile stage there remains an unconscious memory; there is always a risk of neurotic regression to it. The malady has been well named Narcissism. And it becomes a plague among the Romantics, broodingly withdrawn from the real world and their fellow-men. Rousseau, Wordsworth, Chateaubriand, Byron, Lamartine, Vigny, Musset, Hugo—all show a self-absorption that at times grows grotesque. Fortunately, even if they lived like Narcissus, the loving Echo of their voices has not died.

Rousseau, for example, is convinced of being a man unique and apart. "*Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent.*" When he falls in love, it is "*la passion la plus vive peut-être qu'aucun homme ait jamais sentie.*" "*Peut-être*" is something. But even "*peut-être*" vanishes elsewhere: "*Moi qui me suis cru toujours, et qui me crois encore, à tout prendre, le meilleur des hommes.*" Yet Rousseau considers himself modest—"Je crois que jamais individu de notre espèce n'eut naturellement moins de vanité que moi." We may doubt if ever man made more arrogant profession of humility.

"*Méditations enchantées!*" writes Chateaubriand, "*charmes secrets et ineffables d'une âme jouissant d'elle-même, c'est au sein des déserts d'Amérique que je vous*

ai goûtés à longs traits ! . . . Lorsque, dans mes voyages, je quittai les habitations européennes et me trouvai pour la première fois seul au milieu d'un océan de forêts . . . dans l'espèce de délire qui me saisit, je ne suivais aucune route, j'allais d'arbre en arbre, à gauche, à droite indifféremment, et me disant en moi-même: 'Ici plus de chemins à suivre, plus de ville, plus d'étroites maisons, plus de rois, plus de présidents de République, plus de lois, et plus d'hommes. . . .'¹

All his life René sat like a lonely eagle brooding, with at intervals some magnificent cry, over a world not worthy of him. "Si Napoléon avait fini avec les rois, il n'en avait pas fini avec moi." Or again, to quote one of his prefaces: "C'est l'homme beaucoup plus que l'auteur, qu'on verra partout: je parle éternellement de moi."²

Similarly, Blake has no qualms about considering one of his works "the Grandest Poem that this World contains" (true, it had been dictated by spirits); and we know from other sources that de Quincey was not altogether romancing when he said: "if you have reason to write a life of Lucifer, set down that by possibility, in respect to pride, he might be some type of Wordsworth"³.

¹ See E. Faguet, *Dix-Neuvième Siècle*, "Chateaubriand".

² Cf. the malicious, but unerring stabs of Sainte-Beuve: "En général, M. de Chateaubriand est un peu trop disposé à s'étonner de sa destinée." (E.g. at Mycenae he thinks he has hit on the tomb of Clytemnestra: "Singulière destinée, qui me fait sortir tout exprès de Paris pour découvrir les cendres de Clytemnestre!") And again: "M. de Chateaubriand embrassait quelquefois son adversaire; mais sur le balcon." That voice would have been sadly lost if no multitudes had followed it into the wilderness to listen.

³ Cf. Wordsworth's sudden remark at a large party: "Davy, do you know why I published *The White Doe* in quarto?" "No." "To show the world my opinion of it."

The egotism of Byron is fiercer and more deliberate¹; Lamartine's more wistful—

Lamartine ignorant qui ne sait que son âme;

Alfred de Vigny's sterner, yet as naïve. After his reception by the Academy, "How did you like my speech?" asked Vigny of a friend. "A little long, perhaps." "Oh, but I am not tired." Hugo, again, to a youth who said he had been reading Goethe and Schiller, could reply: "Mais à quoi bon? Je les résume tous." He allows his mistress in her letters to compare him favourably with Christ and to anticipate the time when mankind will date their chronology, instead, from Victor Hugo—"Je crois que si Dieu se montre jamais à moi, ce sera sous ta forme." Even a modern dictator could hardly ask more.

In one of the most famous flights of the Romantic school, the young Musset impishly likens the moon above a tall chimney to the dot over an "i".² A habit of surmounting their own ego with a lunatic halo was the

¹ Cf. Peacock's Mr Cypress: "Sir, I have quarrelled with my wife; and a man who has quarrelled with his wife is absolved from all duty to his country. I have written an ode to tell people as much, and they may take it as they list". And Byron's own words: "neither the music of the shepherds, the crashing of the avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the glacier, the forest, nor the cloud, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the glory, around, above, and beneath me".

² We may recall, too, the Doppelgänger obsession that haunted Musset (like Rossetti)—

Un jeune homme vêtu de noir,
Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.

This hallucination really occurred to him; and might serve as yet another symbol of Romantic egotism. Even when the Romantics meet a ghost, it is still an *alter ego*.

common failing of the Romantics in general¹ (though we perhaps, as members of the only race, so far as I know, which is egotistic enough to use a capital letter for its first person singular, cannot be too critical).

True, literary men have seldom been humble; but they have in some ages shown more fear of their fellows' ridicule, less tendency to parade in public, like processions of sandwich-men, with bleeding hearts on every sleeve. Goldsmith, we know, was vain.

And one, the happiest writer of his time,
Grew pale at hearing Reynolds was sublime;
That Rutland's Duchess wore a heavenly smile—
"And I", said he, "neglected all this while!"²

But for all that, living in the age of "good sense" and "good taste", before bleeding hearts had become trump-cards, Goldsmith wrote *The Deserted Village*; not *The Deserted Goldsmith*. His great contemporary versified *The Vanity of Human Wishes*; not *The Vanity of Samuel Johnson*. The drawing of his own personality he left to another—Boswell. He has not lost by it.

And again how graceful by contrast with these egotists is that perfect lady of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's contemporary, Mme de Boufflers!—

Il faut dire en deux mots
Ce qu'on veut dire;
Les longs propos
Sont sots.

¹ The trait still persists. Cf. J. Renard, *Journal*, p. 929: "Coolus raconte que d'Annunzio, lors de sa première visite à Sarah Bernhardt, s'arrêta à quelques pas d'elle et dit, comme inspiré: 'Belle! Magnifique! D'Annunzienne!' Après quoi, il dit: 'Bonjour, madame'."

² Crabbe.

The Decline & Fall of the Romantic Ideal.
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Il ne faut pas toujours conter,
 Citer,
 Dater,
 Mais écouter.

Il faut éviter l'emploi
 Du moi, du moi,
 Voici pourquoi;
 Il est tyrannique,
 Trop académique;
 L'ennui, l'ennui
 Marche avec lui.

Je me conduis toujours ainsi
 Ici,
 Aussi
 J'ai réussi.

Naturally this new Narcissism becomes part of a vicious circle. Living on his feelings the Romantic grows more and more self-centred: the more self-centred he grows, the more he is reduced to living on his own feelings. His ego becomes his Universe; and only the fires of passionate excitement can prevent it from becoming a desert Universe of death and darkness. "The great object of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even though in pain"—that Byronic cry is the keynote of one Romantic career after another. The "pain" was seldom slow to follow.

Those who seek such perpetual intoxication, must either vary the stimulant or increase the dose. Variation is sought by a growing cult for every kind of *bizarrierie*. Baudelaire, for example, calls on Maxime du Camp with his hair dyed green.¹ Maxime du Camp studiously ignores it. At last Baudelaire is driven to ask point blank—"Vous ne trouvez rien d'anormal en moi?"—"Mais

¹ There are now literary ladies in America, apparently, who dye theirs pink. D'Annunzio has appeared in a blue wig. So few ways are there of being original.

non.”—“Cependant j’ai des cheveux verts, et ça n’est pas commun.”—“Tout le monde a des cheveux plus ou moins verts; si les vôtres étaient bleu de ciel, ça pourrait me surprendre; mais des cheveux verts, il y en a sous bien des chapeaux à Paris.” But Maxime du Camp was less successful in coping with a similar taste for oddities in his friend Flaubert, who once borrowed from a showman a five-legged sheep which had fascinated him, in order to let it loose in Maxime du Camp’s bedroom when he was ill.

But tastes for green hair, blue roses, black mistresses, or five-legged sheep are comparatively harmless. Unfortunately there are not enough novelties in this world. The doses of excitement have to be increased as well as varied. Thus a young man to whom his parents have given the name of Théophile Dondey (actually they had not even called him Théophile), can juggle its letters into the more picturesque “Philothée O’Neddy”. But what’s in a name? Such thin excitements soon pall.

He finds it necessary to publish verses with some title like *Feu et Flamme*. But not even this can assure immortality. Where to-day is Philothée O’Neddy? With his forgotten and no less romantic peers—Augustus Mackeat (whose real name was Maguet) and Napoléon Tom and Jehan du Seigneur, with his extra “h”, and Petrus Borel, “le lycanthrope”, and Elias Wildmanstadius, “l’homme moyen-âge”. The famous red waistcoat of Théophile Gautier, despite the moths of time, has outlived all these in the memories of common men.

And so it became necessary to go on and on from frenzy to frenzy. The novel of horrors, for example, had to plunge from skulls to skeletons, from skeletons to whole cemeteries. The worms of Monk

Lewis¹ grow tame beside the refinements of Poe. Similarly love has to become a volcanic eruption.

J'ai l'âme en feu, je suis volcan,
Je brûle, je souffle, et je crache.²

Young Frenchmen of the period, learning that they will be parted for three whole monstrous weeks from their mistresses, rush out into woods, howling "comme un démon"³ and roll on the ground, grinding snapped-off branches between their teeth. Suffice a description by Berlioz of his own interview with Harriet Smithson shortly before their marriage: "Il y a eu un reproche de ne pas l'aimer; là-dessus, je lui ai répondu de guerre lasse en m'empoisonnant à ses yeux. Cris affreux d'Henriette!...désespoir sublime!...rires atroces de ma part!...désir de revivre en voyant ses terribles protestations d'amour!...émétique!...ipécacuana!...vomissements de deux heures!...il n'est resté que deux grains d'opium; j'ai été malade trois jours et j'ai survécu."⁴

It reads like a parody of the end of Emma Bovary. No wonder that, scaling Vesuvius in eruption at midnight, the young musician felt, he says, face to face with a brother-soul. No wonder gentlemen took to going about with their hands pressed on their chests for fear of a sudden physical explosion of so much pent-up passion. And the violence, in France, of the ensuing reaction against all this becomes also more intelligible.

¹ E.g. "Often have I, at waking, found my fingers ringed with the long worms which bred in the corrupted flesh of my infants." This Romantic obsession with physical horrors suggests other neurotic regressions—sadism and necrophily.

² From a contemporary satire. L. Maigron, *Le Romantisme et les Mœurs*, p. 145.

³ From a letter written by the hero himself. Maigron, p. 153.

⁴ Maigron, p. 155.

"De mon temps," observed an elderly gentleman in a tedious *salon* of 1850, "c'était plus amusant. De mon temps, Monsieur, nous traînions les femmes par la chevelure sur le parquet." Others were less regretful. It is clear that impulses exaggerated to this extent are approaching the definitely morbid—the point where we are faced not merely with exaggeration, but disease.

There was also the danger of insincerity. Men who pursue emotion for emotion's sake are tempted both to lash to hysteria the feelings they have, and to simulate feelings they have not. Thus Fontanes, the friend of Chateaubriand, trying to be as romantic as *Ossian*, performs the feat of becoming much more ridiculous:

Que ne puis-je habiter les monts couverts de neige
Où l'Écosse enferme ses citoyens heureux,
Et contemplant les mers qui baignent la Norvège,
Rêver au bruit des vents sous un ciel ténébreux!

Imagine the dismay of the gentle Fontanes, had some impish Arabian genie taken him at his word and deposited him in December at Cape Wrath.

Similarly, though Barry Cornwall could not even face a Channel passage, this did not deter him from writing:

I'm on the Sea! I'm on the Sea!
I am where I would ever be...
I love (oh! how I love) to ride
On the fierce foaming bursting tide...
I never was on the dull tame shore
But I lov'd the great sea more and more.

It is deadly for poetry, when the rage for feeling intensely fails as tamely as this; sometimes it was still deadlier for the poet, when it succeeded.

For often, indeed, this Romantic relaxation of control seems like a regression to childishness. The Romantic

idealization of childhood, as in Traherne, Vaughan, Wordsworth, Hugo, Swinburne, Stevenson, and Walter de la Mare is not without significance. It too is part of the Romantic dreamer's flight from the harsh, drab world of adult life. The childishness of the Middle Ages or the childishness of the nursery—both alike are refuges from the present. Childhood renewed has been spoken of as the gate to Heaven; it can also prove the gate to Hell. This path of escape, followed up to a point, can be delightful; followed too far, it can end in morbid abnormality. Here we approach that region of Romanticism, grown decadent,

Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things.

Not only were many of the Romantics childishly self-absorbed. The movement gave rise to more sinister peculiarities, which lie behind Goethe's description of it as "disease"; to sadism and masochism, the pleasure of inflicting pain and the pleasure of having it inflicted; to the twilit horrors of Poe and the Satanism of Baudelaire.

Satanism is the rebellious cry: "Evil, be thou my good." It may be merely ludicrous, as in the Neapolitan lady who wished it were a mortal sin to drink iced sherbet; or in jaded persons who form societies of "Splendid Sinners" and dabble in Black Masses. Stolen waters are sweet and nothing so fascinating as the forbidden. Romantics have always loved a rebel.

Talk to me not about the Book of Sin,
For, friend, to tell the truth,
That is the book I would be written in—
It is so full of youth.¹

¹ Hafiz (transl. R. le Gallienne).

Symonds, again, records how among the young Italians of the Renaissance in its decline it was so common to find a special thrill in seducing nuns, that this type of gallant acquired special names, like *monachini*. So at this period we hear of young French Romantics taking pleasure in dressing up their mistresses as nuns and reading breviaries with them. There was even a group that assembled on Sundays to worship Satan. Thus at a meeting in February 1846 were recited seven poems, one in praise of each of the Seven Deadly Sins.¹ A significant passage from the praise of Pride runs thus:

L'obéissance est douce au vil cœur des classiques;
Ils ont toujours quelqu'un pour modèle et pour loi.
Un artiste ne doit écouter que son moi,
Et l'orgueil seul emplit les âmes romantiques.

The slavish Classic soul loves docile awe—
To serve some master or some ordinance.
An artist's self should be his only law—
Pride alone fills the brave heart of Romance.

Other effusions from the same source are equally explicit:

Divinité du Mal, viens à moi, je t'implore;
Viens, détruis l'univers sous ton souffle empesté.

Je voudrais m'enivrer de coupables délices,
Aux bourgeois abhorrés paraître original,
Pour les cœurs innocents inventer des supplices,
Faire fleurir l'inceste en un sein virginal.

Mon âme est un cloaque immonde où, sans émoi,
Se tordent enlacés les plus hideux reptiles.

Sentir, je veux sentir à n'importe quel prix!

¹ Maigron, p. 187. Cf. Swinburne's puerile fantasy of having seven towers in which to enact in weekly rotation the Seven Deadly Sins.

"Ah! tonnerre et sang!" writes a Jeune-France fired by seeing the *Anthony* of Dumas into out-ranting Shakespeare's Edmund, "Pourquoi suis-je légitime! Pourquoi ne suis-je pas bâtard!"¹

Such impulses may be merely curiosities in the history of morals; but they have left their mark on the history of literature. This Satanic rebel recurs in Blake, in Schiller's *Robbers*, in the Novel of Horror, in Byron's Giaours and Corsairs and Laras and Manfreds and Cains and Don Juans.

There was in him a vital scorn of all:
As if the worst had fall'n which could befall,
He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurled.

He reappears, rather feebly, in the Octave of Stendhal's *Armance*; in Baudelaire; in Poe; in phrases of Swinburne about

The lilies and languors of virtue,
The roses and raptures of vice;

in the haunted preoccupation of Rossetti with Sirens and lost souls; in Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. Proust's Mademoiselle Vinteuil deliberately pursuing her Lesbianism in front of her dead father's photograph serves to show the persistence of the type. Even Alfred de Vigny's *Éloa*, the angel who of her tenderness falls in love with Satan,² is a nobler symbol of this recurrent tendency of the Romantic soul. From the prevalent fashion of Satanic mania, indeed, not even dogs were exempted. Readers of the Goncourts' journal may recall the dog of Rollinat, who had made the poor beast insanelly

¹ Maigron, p. 104.

² Cf. Lamartine's *La Chute d'un Ange*.

Bohemian by beating it when it behaved well, and giving it sugar when it did not. How typical is the contrast between this Romantic pride in "the purity of their diabolicism" and the comment of the Prince de Ligne with his eighteenth-century good sense and good breeding on the blasphemies of Frederick the Great's conversation—"Il mettait un peu trop de prix à sa damnation."

What is the origin of such Satanism? This too seems one of the crocodiles of the Unconscious; this rebellion, this trampling on the ideal, may be in part another form of infantilism, of the so-called Oedipus-complex. Blake for example was not only the first to see in Milton's Satan the patron-saint of Romantic rebellion—so that "the true poet" is "of the Devil's party", even if like Milton he does not know it; Blake's own doggerel railings against God under the title of "Nobodaddy" (illuminating name) are as Oedipodean as any psychoanalyst could desire.

To Nobodaddy

Why are thou silent and invisible,
Father of Jealousy?
Why dost thou hide thyself in clouds
From every searching Eye?
Why darkness and obscurity
In all thy words and laws,
That none dare eat the fruit but from
The wily serpent's jaws?
Or is it because Secrecy gains females' loud applause?

Akin to this is the Romantic preoccupation with incest, as in earlier Romantics like Euripides and Ford, so in Walpole's *Mysterious Mother*, in *Laon and Cythna*, *The Cenci*, *René*, *Manfred*, and *Parisina*, and in Byron's own life; not to mention later works like d'Annunzio's

Città Morta. For incest itself is still pursuit of *La Princesse Lointaine*: none so impossibly remote, by the laws of society, as a man's closest kin. It is also the most fundamental of all rebellions against the Father.

But there are yet other crocodiles in the Unconscious, which the Romantic has sometimes invited out, to live with and on him. Among the most primitive of our impulses appears that lust for destruction which goes side by side with our passion to live. According to Count Keyserling, the Chinese with all their self-control are liable to fits of bull-fury about nothing—"The Chinese explain this phenomenon through the accumulation of the substance of anger, Ch'i". We may recall Aristotle's *catharsis* and Ibsen's pet scorpion, which used to grow ill unless given now and then a piece of fruit into which it could discharge its venom, so that Ibsen recognized in it a symbol of himself. As another poet has put it—

The barest branch is beautiful
One moment, while it breaks.

This delight in destruction, prominent at an infantile stage, may later develop and turn outwards as sadism, which tortures what it loves, or inwards, as masochism, which loves being tortured.

Now a learned work has been written by Dr Mario Praz, *La Carne, La Morte, e il Diavolo nella Letteratura Romantica*, which, taking for its text a sentence of Sainte-Beuve's, sees stretching across all Romanticism this monstrous shadow of the Marquis de Sade. It is a valuable and heavily documented book; but a great many of the authors dealt with are, after all, merely the pygmies of Romanticism. It is important not to exaggerate this element of perversion; but it must be

faced, because it provides another example of the part played in Romantic literature by the less conscious impulses of the mind; because the decay of Romanticism was hastened by it; and because the good and bad in Romanticism cannot be balanced without.

This strange fascination of suffering, this love of Dolores, "Our Lady of Pain", is no invention of "the divine Marquis" from whom it takes its name. Its presence is already felt in plays like those of Seneca and some Elizabethans, in novels like Nash's *Unfortunate Traveller*. And the genial and enthusiastic Diderot, in more ways than one a forerunner of Romanticism, already recognized it.

Of a statue of Cleopatra with her asp he writes: "Les grands effets naissent partout des idées voluptueuses entrelacées avec les idées terribles; par exemple de belles femmes à demi-nues (*sic*) qui nous présentent un breuvage délicieux dans les crânes sanglants de nos ennemis. Voilà le modèle de toutes les choses sublimes. C'est alors que l'âme s'ouvre au plaisir et frissonne d'horreur." It is an odd idea; but it was one day to become a common one and be put in practice, skulls and all.¹

Thus at the end of her mad affair with Musset, George Sand buys a skull and encloses in it her lover's last letter. A young lady calls one evening and leaves

¹ To Sophie Volland, 15. x. 1762. (Quoted in F. C. Green, *Minuet*.) Cf. *De la Poésie Dramatique* (*Works* vii, 371), where Diderot speaks of the romance of scenes, "où des pythies écumantes par la présence d'un démon qui les tourmente, sont assises sur des trépiers, ont les yeux égarés, et font mugir de leurs cris prophétiques le fond obscur des antres; où les dieux, altérés du sang humain, ne sont apaisés que par son effusion." We are reminded of Flaubert's *Salammbô* and D. H. Lawrence's *Plumed Serpent*—neither, I feel, examples of Romanticism at its happiest.

a skull on Sainte-Beuve. Victor Hugo keeps a skull on his mantelpiece as a more poetic way of recording time than a clock. His Han d'Islande drinks sea-water from a skull; and the young of the thirties sing—

Nous allons boire à nos maîtresses
Dans le crâne de leurs amants.

The whole Romantic rage for horrors, already mentioned as an instance of their craving for violent sensations in general, clearly owes some of its force to this infantile lust for destruction and death in particular. Berlioz at Florence meets a young woman's funeral in the street, follows it, has the coffin opened, takes the dead hand—"Si j'avais été seul, je l'aurais embrassée." There even grew up a fashion for loving young women because consumptive—

Un démon de velours, une pensionnaire,
Belle de deux défauts, gâtée et poitrine.¹

Baudelaire approaches his mistress—

Je m'avance à l'attaque, et je grimpe aux assauts
Comme après un cadavre un chœur de vermisseaux.

There is no need to multiply this "wormy circumstance", nor to quote *La Charogne*, a poem still popular in some circles. The malady is common enough. But a little more must be said of the pleasure felt in inflicting pain. A mania of this type is the simplest and most charitable explanation of Byron's treatment in real life of Lady Byron, from her wedding-day to the birth of their child. It was not ordinary hatred for one of whom in other moods he was fond, that cried on their honeymoon, "I will live with you, if I can, till I have got an heir—

¹ Maigron, p. 180; who gives abundant other examples.

then I shall leave you"; and yet, at another moment, "You should have a softer pillow than my heart...". Before Ada's birth, he told Lady Byron he hoped she would die and the child with her; and, if it lived, he cursed it. And yet when his wife at last abandons him, he bursts into cries of rage and anguish.

A far clearer expression of this state of mind is found, once more, in Baudelaire; above all in the famous

C'est l'Ennui. L'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.

Similarly the heroine of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which is not only a masterpiece, but also a perfect medical dictionary of Romantic maladies, after her phases first of Scott and knights-errant, then of sultans and minarets, sinks near the end to read "jusqu'au matin des livres extravagants, où il y avait des tableaux orgiaques avec *des situations sanglantes*". Swinburne was obsessed with the same impulse. Anyone who feels sceptical of its presence in *Atalanta* and *Anactoria*, *Phaedra* and *Faustine*, may speedily remove his doubts by a glance at the poet's puerile ecstasies over flogging in *Lesbia Brandon* or *The Whippingham Papers*. And those who wish for further examples of this disease of Romanticism will find them in Dr Praz, who points out—very acutely, I think—that this obsession with giving or suffering pain has produced two recurrent types in Romantic literature. First there is the sinister and daemonic male, like Anne Radcliffe's Montoni and Schedoni; the elder Cenci; Emily Brontë's Heathcliff with "his sharp cannibal teeth", his "yearning" for "crushing out entrails" and hanging dogs; Stendhal's Julien Sorel, who shoots his

mistress in church; and some of the figures in Mérimée, Baudelaire, and Baudelaire's cherished Edgar Allan Poe. Here too Life took to aping Art; and Gautier has amusingly described the Romantic type of the thirties:

J'étais sombre et farouche,
 Mon sourcil se tordait sur mon front soucieux,
 Ainsi qu'un vipère en fureur; et mes yeux
 Dardaient entre mes cils un regard ferme et louche;
 Un sourire infernal crispait ma pâle bouche.

To-day this sort of sadism once more reappears in D. H. Lawrence, whose lovers embrace their mistresses with hands red from killing rabbits, or genially reflect—

Under the glistening cherries, with folded wings
 Three dead birds lie;
 Pale-breasted throistles and a blackbird, robberlings
 Stained with red dye.

Against the haystack a girl stands laughing at me,
 Cherries hung round her ears,
 Offers me her scarlet fruit: I will see
 If she has any tears.

The counterpart of these male Romantic ogres, displacing them more and more as the movement grew more decadent and effeminate, was the female of the species—*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. It is not wholly accident, I think, that the writer of that most perfect poem should also have written in real life to Fanny Brawne: "I have two luxuries to brood on, your loveliness and the hour of my death. Oh that I could have possession of them both in the same minute."¹ This type of the *femme fatale* reappears in his *Lamia*, in Mérimée's

¹ Cf. for the reverse side of this passion, his other phrase to her: "You must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you."

Vénus d'Ille, in the Cleopatras of Pushkin and Gautier, in the Salammbô of Flaubert and the Ennoia of his *Tentation de St Antoine*:¹ "Elle a été l'Hélène des Troyens, dont le poète Stésichore a maudit la mémoire. Elle a été Lucrèce, la patricienne violée par les rois. Elle a été Dalila, qui coupait les cheveux de Samson. Elle a été cette fille d'Israël qui s'abandonnait aux boucs.... Elle s'est prostituée à tous les peuples. Elle a chanté dans tous les carrefours. Elle a baisé tous les visages.... Innocente comme le Christ, qui est mort pour les hommes, elle s'est dévouée pour les femmes.... Elle est Minerve! Elle est le Saint-Esprit."

Here a familiar echo is heard, a familiar face appears—Pater's *La Gioconda*: "She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave...and as Leda was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as St Anne, the mother of Mary".

It is amusing to detect from her accent that this versatile vampire had been also the Ennoia of Flaubert.² As a description of the fat and fatuous female who simpers from the canvas of Leonardo, one may find Pater's purple fantasy a little overwrought; it would make a far truer picture of the *Belle Dame Sans Merci* of Romanticism in general; who has found yet other incarnations in that Siren of Rossetti who sings in the apple-tree above the

¹ See Mario Praz, p. 212, and his whole chapter on *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.

² Her form of utterance, indeed, is far older still. Cf. Taliesin: "I carried the banner before Alexander.... I was in Canaan when Absalom was slain.... I was in the hall of Don before Gwydion was born.... I was on the horse's crupper of Elias and Enoch; I was on the high cross of the merciful son of God; I was chief overseer at the building of the tower of Nimrod; I have dwelled three times in the castle of Arianrod...."

pit full of her lovers' bones; in Dolores and Mary Stuart and many another heroine of Swinburne; in the Salome of Mallarmé, Wilde, and Beardsley; in the Rebecca West and Hedda Gabler and Hilda Wangel of Ibsen; in the morbid ending of Flecker's *Hassan*; or in those films of Greta Garbowhich, with their magnificent Scandinavian restraint, still bewitch a modern world that has turned its back on poetry.

Sensationalism, Satanism, Sadism—these were the three maladies of later Romanticism. They appear to have gone further in France than here (though it must be remembered that abroad Sadism is reputed a particularly English taste). Consequently, the reaction was quicker and more violent there than in England. As in politics, so in literature, France has always swung to wilder extremes. In any case Romanticism had brought, together with much that is immortal, an orgy of sensation and senselessness. Flaubert, son of a great doctor and himself half a Romantic, so that he could exclaim "I am Emma Bovary", has made a masterpiece of his *post-mortem* on dead Romance. And Baudelaire, its supreme martyr, has written in a style of Classic purity its agonized *Nunc Dimittis*.

It is worth dwelling a moment on this poem, *Le Voyage*, which he might well have called "Odyssey", and contrasting it with earlier Romantic treatments of the same theme. For if Homer's *Odyssey* gives us the beginnings of Romanticism, this is indeed its bitter end. The wine of the Romantic Dionysus is drunk—here are its acrid lees.

Homer's Odysseus is warned by the spirit of Tiresias,

the prophet in Hades, that even when he has won his hearth again in Ithaca, he must one day set forth once more, with an oar on his shoulder, till he comes to men who so little know the sea that they mistake his oar for a winnowing-shovel. Now Homer's Romanticism is moderate and rational; not the daemonic restlessness it was one day to become; and so his Odysseus receives this prophecy with stoic silence and changes the subject. What must be, must be; so the gods have doomed.

Two thousand years later, the mediaeval imagination of Dante was fired by this idea of the old hero's final quest. Dante meets the soul of Ulysses drifting in a fireball, which eternally consumes it, along the Eighth Circle of Hell. For Ulysses is now damned on account of his too cunning stratagems on earth, such as the wooden horse of Troy. To Greek common sense such punishment for a legitimate and brilliant feint of war would have seemed completely crazy; but we are now in the Middle Ages, when men had more imagination than intelligence. Dante's Ulysses is accordingly far more Romantic than Homer's; he tells with superb eloquence how he was driven once more to sea by his passion to explore for exploration's sake. The Greek Odysseus would have felt this a strange lunacy. He had himself feigned madness, though in vain, to escape leaving home for Troy; not even *princesses lointaines*, though two of them were goddesses, could make him forget his longing to return; and so far was his very human common sense from the passionate *Wanderlust* of Dante's hero, that he wept aloud in Circe's bed and rolled about in speechless misery, when she told him he must first sail to Hades to

consult Tiresias. And yet Dante's Ulysses becomes magnificent in his far wilder fantasy:

nè dolcezza di figlio, nè la pieta
del vecchio padre, nè il debito amore
lo qual dovea Penelope far lieta,
vincer poter dentro da me l' ardore
ch' i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto,
e degli vizii umani e del valore....

"o frati," dissi, "che per cento milia
perigli siete giunti all' occidente,
a questa tanto picciola vigilia
de' vostri sensi, ch' è del rimanente,
non vogliate negar l' esperienza,
di retro al sol, del mondo senza gente.
considerate la vostra semenza:
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza."

Neither my own dear son could hinder me,
Nor my old father, nor the sacred claim
Of love I owed my sad Penelope,
So eagerly my spirit rose aflame
For ever-new experience of the world,
Of human greatness and of human shame...

"Brothers," I said, "home to our western isle
We struggled through a thousand perils run;
Waste not this last watch that, a little while,
Is left our eyes and ears, ere all be done;
Lose not the knowledge that ye might have known
Of that unpeopled world beyond the sun.
Consider of what seed ye have been sown,
Who were not born to waste your days as beasts,
But to win worth and wisdom for your own."

So they sail out past Gibraltar, south across the line,
and after five moons see looming up dimly like a greater
Tenerife, the Mount of Purgatory; then God smites them

and they sink. And yet that Dante should then complacently leave his hero roasting for eternity, is one of the things that make his genius seem to me as deformed as it was great.

The Romantic Revival had its own Odysseus—the Ancient Mariner. He too finds a Purgatory in the wastes of sea south of the line. But it is worth noticing that in parts, as where his hermit appears, with mossy oak-stump for cushion, Coleridge is more “mediaeval” than Dante himself; especially in his earlier version with its over-antiquated ballad-diction. He is also more romantically picturesque; for the poet has now become more sensitive to the background, the setting, the scenery, the appurtenances of his story. It is above all as a collection of seascapes that *The Ancient Mariner* lives. As in so much Romantic literature, the character of its hero remains shadowy. This reincarnation of Flying Dutchman and Wandering Jew is, indeed, almost Everyman. Coleridge’s moral is more appealing than Dante’s—it insists on pity even for animals, instead of eternal torture for human beings; though it remains not much more intelligent to condemn a whole ship’s company to die of thirst because one of them has shot a bird. Coleridge himself came to feel that the moral was not quite happy; but, after all, it hardly matters. Romance is a dream, not a treatise on ethics. Some may find, indeed, that it is here a little too dreamy; that Coleridge is only writing a picturesque fantasy, where Dante was uttering in grim earnest the truth that was in him; that Poetry, in short, has here sunk from a gospel and a vision to an entertainment and a Quantock night’s dream. But, when all is said, *The Ancient Mariner* remains

an immortal miracle, an example of what we should have irreplaceably lost without the Romantic Revival.

From Dante Tennyson took up the tradition. With his *Ulysses* appears that reaction half-way to Classicism in which Tennyson and Arnold correspond to the French Parnassians. Tennyson's Ulysses is far less than Dante's a victim of blind irresistible impulse, like some migrant bird. He too longs, indeed,

To follow knowledge like a sinking star
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

And yet he lacks the superhuman, daemonic, Michel-angelesque mystery of Dante's hero, just because he tries to make his enterprise more rational and intelligible, by telling us, somewhat ungallantly, that Penelope is now old and his Ithacan subjects do not appreciate him. Dante's Ulysses went in spite of the ties of father, wife, and son—so overmastering was his mad desire; Tennyson's Ulysses goes because this elderly traveller feels bored at home and prefers, like Montaigne, to die moving. Even his hope of seeing "the great Achilles whom we knew", that symbol of the lost Arthur Hallam, while further humanizing his motives, divides them, weakens them, leaves them less majestic with mystery.

In fact, Tennyson's poem is an excellent example of the way in which the more Classical type of poetry can lose in intensity what it gains in intelligence and intelligibility. The Victorian Ulysses is a little too much posed in a conventionally noble attitude on the eve of "crossing the bar". Indeed the poem, fine as it is, does not seem to me comparable with *Tithonus*, where Tennyson's melancholy, passionate beyond all reasoned

consolations, utters its vain and agonized cry against mortality.

Baudelaire, before he wrote *Le Voyage*, had probably, I think, read Tennyson's *Ulysses*; he has at least an unmistakable echo of Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters* in their land where "it seemed always afternoon". But Baudelaire, like Dante, is a voice from the deeps of Hell. He lacks Dante's directness; yet here, as in the *Inferno*, we listen to a voice in agonized earnest; not to a musical fantasia composed largely for art's sake, as with Tennyson and Coleridge. And though in inferior artists deadly earnestness can itself prove only too deadly, to the greatest it adds greatness.

In this poem Baudelaire has followed the Romantic primrose-path, to where it winds among deadly nightshade and black bryony—"les fleurs du mal"—out into the last abomination of desolation and disillusion.

O le pauvre amoureux des pays chimériques!
Faut-il le mettre aux fers, le jeter à la mer,
Ce matelot ivrogne, inventeur d'Amériques
Dont le mirage rend le gouffre plus amer?

Alas, poor lover of lands unexplored,
Drunk dreamer of Americas at will,
Must he be put in irons, flung overboard,
Whose mirage makes the salt deep bitterer still?

For all Eldorados are desert islands now—

So, revelling, Imagination sails
To find but a reef when dawn breaks on the sea.

Baudelaire's traveller knows that he can never satisfy his desire, never escape himself or the pursuing feet of Time. Dante's Ulysses found Purgatory; Baudelaire finds Hell. Indeed, like Marlowe's Mephistophilis he carries Hell with him. And like the Psyche of Apuleius,

he finds that the Beauty of Proserpine is Death. This is his gloomy goal; not the loved Ithaca of Homer's simple sanity. Everywhere, for Baudelaire, among the jewelled idols of the East as among the churches of the West, winds "the weary pageant of Immortal Sin".

La femme, esclave vile, orgueilleuse et stupide,
 Sans rire s'adorant et s'aimant sans dégoût;
 L'homme, tyrant goulu, paillard, dur et cupide,
 Esclave de l'esclave et ruisseau dans l'égoût.

Woman, vile slave with vain and vacant brain,
 Smileless self-worship, self-love unrepelled:
 Man, greedy tyrant, lewd, athirst for gain,
 Slave of that slave, stream in that sewer held.

And so life remains for ever "Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui". And yet the Romantic in him, like the Wandering Jew,¹ still cries for ever "Onward!", even when he sails not for China, but for the world below.

O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps ! levons l'ancre !
 Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort ! Appareillons !
 Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
 Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons.
 Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte !
 Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
 Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe ?
 Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau !

Come, Death, old captain ! Time to put to sea !
 Up, anchor ! Earth grows dull. Let us be gone.
 Though black as ink both wave and heaven be,
 Deep in the hearts you know, the light shines on.
 Pour us your poison's comfort. For—so hot
 This fire beats in our brains—we will pursue
 Through the abyss—Hell, Heaven, it matters not—
 Of the Unknown, the quest of what is New.

¹ One of the originals, it should be remembered, of *The Ancient Mariner*.

So ends, in the death and madness of this spectre-ship, the great Romantic quest for new emotions, new fantasies, new intoxications, pursued to its extremity. Here we have travelled far beyond Tennyson's *Gleam* or Arnold's *Scholar-Gipsy*: but farther along the same road. The business of poetry, said Johnson, is "to make new things familiar or familiar things new". The weakness of most Romantics was that they forgot this second half—forgot that man cannot live on nightingales' tongues and pigeons' milk alone.

And so the sense of reality, of the outer world, of the existence of society as well as the individual, soon came sweeping back, in Naturalism. The self-forgetful ecstasies of Bohemian romance were now to be replaced by the dispassionate accuracy of the scientist, the cult of the Unconscious by the cult of specialized concentration, the blue rose by the blue-book. Yet it cannot be said that this scientific industry of the Goncourts and Zola has left work to compare with the triumphs of Romanticism, in spite of all its faults.

No less natural, in poetry, was the reaction from Romantic emotionalism to the impassive Classic perfection of Leconte de Lisle and the Parnassians. But the Romantic wine still remained fermenting, though less furiously. Not only did Hugo, with his superb vitality, continue to dominate his country like a lonely lighthouse, even from his exile in Guernsey; the Symbolists in their turn became even more dream-like than their Romantic ancestors; and to-day the Surrealists have carried the cult of the Unconscious to its limit, writing automatically without allowing the intelligence to interfere at all. It is curious that some human beings can always be found

to carry every experiment to its extreme on their own vile bodies, however unpromising it may appear to the eye of common sense. Still it at least enables others to profit by their experience; though the result is usually exactly what might have been foretold.

In England the decline of Romanticism was far more gradual than in France. The Spasmodics were soon over; but for Tennyson's *Maud* their very name would be forgotten now. But with the Pre-Raphaelites English Romanticism enjoyed a lovely St Martin's summer. It died finally of old age rather than of its own excesses as abroad. The poets merely grew gradually more decadent—Rossetti with his chloral, Swinburne with his half-adult eccentricities, Francis Thompson with his opium, the poets of the nineties with their liqueurs and languors. Until, by the date of Dowson, Romanticism is very tired indeed:

In music I have no consolation,
No roses are pale enough for me.

I was not sorrowful, but only tired
Of everything that ever I desired.

Her lips, her eyes, all day became to me
The shadow of a shadow utterly.

With pale indifferent eyes, we sit and wait
For the dropt curtain and the closing gate.

When Tennyson, like his Arthur, put to sea, he left hardly a Sir Bedivere behind.

The knights were dust,
Their good swords rust.

There remained the magic of Yeats; but the romance of Hardy was a disillusioned romance. To-day either soaking

in the Unconscious has gone so far that the poet maunders unintelligible things in a corner; or we dabble in proletarian poetry and mechanized art, just as the Soviets attempted to make symphonies of steam whistles and dynamos, with no sirens allowed to sing but those of the factory. Similarly the fiction of the cultivated modern varies from excursions into "thinking with the blood", and getting drunk on it, to coldly or cynically scientific vivisections of the heart. And yet the world at large cares little for such literary fashions. There at least the Empire of Romance endures unshaken. It is fascinating, for example, to note the works advertised on the back page of a recent number of the *New York Herald Tribune Books Supplement*—a paper comparable to the *Times Literary Supplement* in England. They are largely by well-known authors; and I have seldom seen a document that gave a more vivid epitome of the tastes and interests of modern man. The page begins with a flourish, in large type, recommending—"The Playboy Killer of Pagan Rome Who Sang Himself to Death. Son of a She Devil! Never has there ruled such a creature as this red-haired Singing Emperor! He delighted in burning and torturing Christians—fed them to his lions. Then his jaded passions sought new thrills in unspeakable practices... colorful despot... Arthur Weigall minces no words... read the shocking truth... slaughter that would have made a cannibal blanch!" How little mankind has changed since Monk Lewis!—except perhaps to grow yet vulgarer. "Marie Antoinette," the list continues, "notorious queen whose frivolity, extravagance and scandal ended on bloody guillotine"; "Napoleon"; "Nudism in Modern Life"; "New Book of Etiquette";

"The Story of Money"; "Astronomy for Everybody"; "Catherine the Great"; "On Going Naked. Adventures of young woman who turned from the private to public practice of nakedness"; "Strategy in Handling People"; "Among the Nudists"; "The Crusades"; "The Flame of Islam"; "Casanova"; "Sappho of Lesbos"; "Genghiz Khan"; "Marc Antony"; "Queen Elizabeth—Amazing era of Virgin Queen who built empire, died of heart-break"; "Is *That* in the Bible? A thousand curious, surprising items"; "Oscar Wilde"; "The Story of Mankind"; "Great Men of Science"; "The Human Body"; "Tamerlane the Earth Shaker"; "The Conquest of Happiness, by Bertrand Russell. Strips the shame from 'sin' and 'love'." Such are the present interests of our great world; some science, a little religion, a great deal of sex, and, still, unlimited Romance. And here as ever appear those three attendant evil spirits of Romance, like the three witches dancing round Macbeth—Sensationalism, Satanism, Sadism. Nero by himself bestrides half the entire page of the above advertisement. Here are still the same itch for destruction, the same fascination for men of terror, like Marlowe's Tamerlane and Genghiz Khan and Napoleon; for women of fate, like Cleopatra and Agrippina and Catherine of Russia. And note that here we are not dealing with that main stronghold of Romance, the novel; these are its mere outposts—biography and history, so-called.

Or, again, turn to the current title-index of English published books and look up "Romance". The titles that comprise the magic word take up two whole columns of ironic juxtaposition. "The Romance of the Animal World" jostles "The Romance of the British Museum"

and is followed by the "Romances"—"of Coal"—"of the Cotton Industry"—"of Commerce"—"of Electricity"—"of Fish Life"—"of Great Businesses"—"of Insect Life"—"of King Arthur"—"of Leonardo"—"of Light-houses"—"of the Machine"—"of Marriage"—"of Mary the Blessed"—"of Million Making"—"of Missionary Heroism"—"of Monte Carlo"—"of the Moon"—"of the Motor Car"—"of Piracy"—"of Poaching in the Highlands"—"of the Post Office"—"of Preaching"—"of Soho"—"of Sorcery"—"of the Sun"—"of Trade"—"of Tristram and Iseult". What a romantic world we appear to live in! What does it mean? That the human craving for intoxication is as insistent as ever and these authors are promising to gratify it by making the British Museum look like the palace of Queen Mab and the Post Office like Avalon—promises perhaps easier to give than to perform.

As in literature, so in life. Romanticism is the gin on which dictators like Hitler and Mussolini still fuddle the fools that acclaim them. "Better live three days as a lion than a hundred years as a sheep"—the youth of a nation repeats it, thrilled. The intelligence is lacking that should have smiled at the idea of "lions" advancing to massacre a half-armed enemy, under cover of gas and armour-plated tanks. A d'Annunzio can still write, urging the young to battle, screaming that the memory of Adowa is like a brand upon his shoulder. Similarly, a few hysterical sentences about Nordic heroism and Aryan purity suffice to build up a whole dream-world, in which a Hitler youth seems to himself a very Galahad as he spits on defenceless Jews.

Romanticism has fallen indeed.

NOTE

A recent work, Mr D. Gascoyne's *Surrealism*, which has reached me just as this goes to press, provides some interesting examples of the Romantic revolt of the Unconscious carried to its extreme and become quite conscious. The Romantic affinities of Surrealism are admitted. Among its ancestors it claims Shakespeare, Marlowe, Coleridge, Blake, Beddoes, Nerval, Baudelaire, and Huysmans. And here once more there rises "the enormous and sinister figure of the Marquis de Sade". Surrealism cannot, I think, be called "Romantic"; but it might well have been called Super-Romanticism; it stands to it as ultra-violet to violet.

Its immediate predecessor was "Dada"—for so the Roumanian Tristan Tzara christened his new movement, by opening a dictionary at random, in a Zürich café in 1916. Dadaism was simply an intellectual anarchism, in revolt against reason and everything else, and expressing itself in ecstasies of Tzara's like—

In your inside there are smoking lamps
the swamp of blue honey
cat crouched in the gold of a flemish inn
boom boom
lots of sand yellow bicyclist
chateaneuf des papes
manhattan there are tubs of excrement before you.
mbaze mbaze bazebaze mleganga garoo.

The Dadaists gave soirées where persons danced dressed in stove-pipes or announced that they would pull their hair out in public; or they held exhibitions to which the entrance led through a public lavatory, while

hatchets were provided for the public to attack the exhibits, and a young girl, dressed as for her first communion, recited obscene poems (cf. p. 111). Similarly Marcel Duchamp sent in a lavatory-basin, entitled "Fountain", to the New York *salon*; and exhibited in Paris a printed reproduction of the Mona Lisa which he had wittily adorned with large moustaches and inscribed "LHOOG" (Look!).

In 1922 Dada, amid much tumult, died in giving birth to Surrealism. Where Dada had been a negative rebellion of adolescent whimsicality, Surrealism deliberately set out to release the Unconscious and to create with the automatism of a dream, "in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations". "In surrealism one relives the best of childhood."

But, though it had acquired a theory for its infantilism, the new movement seems to differ little in practical results from the old. It has produced portraits made of blotting-paper, nibs, and needles; pictures pasted together from pieces of catalogues or newspapers; games worthy of the Mad Hatter, in which answers are given to questions that the answerer is not allowed to hear; films such as *The Golden Age*, in which "The erotic parts reach a high pitch of violence, culminating in a scene during which a flaming fir-tree, an enormous agricultural implement, an archbishop, a giraffe, and some feathers are all flung out of a bedroom window at the top of a house. Other details include the ill-treating of a blind man, a dog being run over, a father killing his son on the spur of the moment, and an old woman having her face slapped." The movement has also created proverbs, such

as "All that fattens is not soft", or "A corset in July is worth a horde of rats"; and highly modern poems like the following:

The quarrel between the boiled chicken and the ventriloquist
had for us the meaning of a cloud of dust
which passed above the city
like the blowing of a trumpet.
It blew so loudly that its bowler-hat was trembling
and its beard stood up on end
to bite off its nose....

With their general tendency to hate and destruction the Surrealists show also a particular animus against "the bourgeois" (cf. p. 111) that has led them to hold out a hand to the Communists; who seem to have remained, however, coldly suspicious.

Here, in fact, that element of "disease" which Goethe found, surely with injustice, in all Romantics, utters its death-rattle; but it is not without interest, I feel, to find views of the relation of Romanticism to the Unconscious and the infantile, which I had originally formed in complete ignorance of Surrealism, to such an extent confirmed by the theory and practice of this its latest aberration.

CHAPTER III

FAIRIES AND FUNGI; OR THE FUTURE OF ROMANTICISM

SUCH seems to me the essential history of Romanticism and its maladies. It begins, before European history, with the mythology of Greece—the dream-tales of a race in its childhood. It recurs to some extent in Greek literature, though chastened by Greek sanity and self-control; to a still smaller extent in the more matter-of-fact and state-minded literature of Rome; until it revives as the shadows of mediaevalism begin to fall. The Middle Ages are its Golden Age. So far, in the *Odyssey* or the *Arabian Nights* or *Aucassin and Nicolette*, Romance remains the healthy day-dreaming of a young imagination, not so much trying to escape from common life as to enhance it—as natural and normal as the dreaming of a dog that imagines itself hunting some perfectly celestial rabbit. Homer's hearers had themselves faced battles and tempests, though less marvellous than his; Malory, like his own Sir Tristram, was a good knight in prison.

The Renaissance tended to look scorn on the rags of mediaeval romance. Still it attempted compromise in Tasso and Ariosto, in Ronsard, in Spenser and Shakespeare. But the compromise collapsed. The mediaeval world became identified with superstition, intolerance, barbarism and folly; it was hunted into an obscure grave before the disciplined onmarch of modern science and ancient culture. When the great reaction came, the new

Romanticism of the Revival was inevitably a more self-conscious and theoretic thing; more of an artificial intoxicant, less of a natural day-dream. Like Theocritus or Apollonius Rhodius in ancient Alexandria, so now Chateaubriand and Coleridge, Scott and Morris call up an imaginary world to redress the drab balance of the real. Keats dreams in Hampstead of stout Cortez in Darien. Men come to look to fantasy for emotional outlets that life has begun to deny. They project themselves into existences simpler or more adventurous than their own, minds unsicklied by analysis and balanced by active bodies and resolute wills. This type of Romanticism may be likened to a healthy use of wine. The Romantic drinks: he is not yet a drunkard.

But that too was to come. Writers begin to seek the hysterical over-stimulation of emotions normal in themselves, as can be seen in George Sand or D. H. Lawrence; the Romantic now drinks to excess. They begin also to seek the stimulation of emotions not normal at all; the Romantic becomes a drug-fiend, distilling "fleurs du mal". Like Narcissus, many of them had grown self-centred, making a god not merely in, but of, their own image; obsessed by their own reflections in the dark pool of personality. To liven the images they sought for sensations to stir the pool. But the spirits that came to trouble the waters for them, were often far from angelic; and in those unconscious depths lurked shapes far from angelic either. Once more reaction was inevitable. To-day Romanticism is no doubt only too much alive still in its less admirable forms; but what future has it in serious literature?

That it should have come under a cloud is in itself nothing. The law that literary fashions change is one of the few critical laws—almost the only one—that really hold. All stimulants lose their force with custom. The goddess Novelty is one of the immortals. Her handiwork is everywhere. The other day in a remote part of Cornwall I noticed she had produced a new kind of tea-cup with a square base instead of a round one, fitting into a square depression in the saucer. Naturally, it required great care and concentration to put it down so that it should fit at all. It had every reason of common sense against it. But it was new. That sufficed.

Yet we cannot be sure that all past fashions will necessarily return with the regularity of Halley's comet. Comets sometimes get lost. Human nature is always changing. Nature itself, which antiquity filled with gracious or terrible beings in its own image, for us grows less and less anthropomorphic, more impersonal, more automatic. Where the Greeks saw Olympus, we see a sort of infinite generating station. The Tibetans pray with wheels: but it is harder to pray to them.

And while Nature loses her personality, we tend by analysis to break up our own. Thinking always of his thoughts, scrutinizing his feelings, the modern man finds it ever harder to be carried out of himself by emotion or by dreams. He loses the gift of Romantic ecstasy. He begins to remember even in passionate moments that he did not view things so yesterday, and will not to-morrow. Such sincerity makes it harder and harder to be sincere. The wild impulses that once sprang or soared like wild things in a wilderness, grow shy with the sense,

now, of the watching eye of another self always upon them.

She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone,
And the fool-heart of the counting-house fears all
But soft beauty and indolent desire.¹

While the many reel back into hysteria, the *sécheresse* of the eighteenth century threatens the few. Calvin Coolidge returns from church. "What did the preacher talk about?" asks that strong silent man's wife. "Sin." "And what did he say about it?" "He was against it." In minds more intelligent there reappears to-day the same malady as shows itself in the arid pages of Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* or in Madame de Charrière's relations with its author—lovers probing and dissecting their own dry hearts into dust. "More and more, as I grow older," wrote de Tocqueville, "I respect the passions, even bad. They are at least a force." "Man is only truly great," echoes Disraeli's Sidonia, "when he acts from his passions; never irresistible but when he appeals to the Imagination. Even Mormon counts more votaries than Bentham." This is but too true. A. D. H. Lawrence makes far more proselytes than a Hardy or a Proust. Faith can move mountains. Unfortunately it usually drops them on other people's heads. Such are the evils of too much passion, or too little: but it is even worse, perhaps, to have too little than too much. And that is the modern intellectual's danger.

What is the remedy? It is easy to talk of "turning and living with the animals", of "thinking with the

¹ Yeats, *The Old Age of Queen Maeve*.

blood", or of going even a step further in the company of Mr Yeats and thinking with the marrow.

God save me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone,
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow bone.

I pray—for fashion's word is out
And prayer comes round again—
That I may seem, though I die old,
A foolish, passionate man.

So Romantic in his old age remains our greatest living poet. But can we thus self-consciously revert to the Unconscious? "Je n'ai pas su me simplifier", cries regretfully Turgenev's helpless Nejdanoſ. It is no longer easy to be simply wise and wisely simple. And yet, as Bertrand Russell says, when intellectuals question if life be worth living while gardeners feel no doubt of it, it looks as if intellectuals had still something to learn from gardeners; for, so long as life seems worth living, worth living it is.

Life and literature are an eternal tight-rope walk. Balance is essential. To the question "Classic or Romantic?" the answer is surely "Both". As Herrick and Milton realized when they praised the loveliness of poetry with paradoxes about "wild civility" or "wanton heed and giddy cunning". The pure Classic is too stiff and stifled; the pure Romantic too drunken and wayward; the pure Realist too drab; the Surrealist a self-segregated sot. Classicism, Romanticism, Realism are three extremes, three points of a triangle; the magic circle lies inscribed within it. There move Homer and Aeschylus, Virgil and Tacitus, Chaucer and Ronsard

and Shakespeare. Nearer the edge are writers like Racine and Hugo and Ibsen; outside it, the too heroic tragedy of the seventeenth century, the too Classic tragedy of the eighteenth, the too realistic novels of nineteenth and twentieth. The golden mean is hackneyed; but, like gold, it does not grow rusty. Blake might exclaim impatiently of Reynolds—

He has observed the golden rule
Till he's become the golden fool.

But Reynolds' pictures last quite as well as Blake's. He may write, with typical tantrums: "The Greek and Roman Classics is the Ante-Christ. I say Is and not Are as most expressive and correct too." But the Classic writers and English grammar still survive. "He really saw these things", Rodin was told, as he looked at some drawings by Blake. "Yes," came the answer, "but he should have seen them three or four times." He did not see them steadily or whole. Stendhal shows more understanding of both needs; writing at one time: "Ce que j'ai le plus aimé, c'était la rêverie"; and, at another, "Si je ne vois pas clair, tout mon monde est anéanti." But even Stendhal often fails to hold his balance; so that his novels oscillate from the confines of melodrama to the dryness of the *Code Napoléon*.¹

There is in fact a time to dream and a time to wake; a time to remember reality and a time to forget it; a time to be drunk and a time to be sober; a time to "think with the blood" and a time to think with the brain. But none of these to excess. The Greeks knew it; that is why there

¹ It is typical that Stendhal should have been badly upset in the middle of a Napoleonic battle by a general who was so tritely romantic as to exclaim: "C'est une bataille de géants".

is so much that is Romantic in their so-called classics. Apollo did not burn the worshippers of Dionysus; he gave his young brother a share in his own Delphic shrine.

But can this balance be attained by calculation? Classicism, indeed, in its self-consciousness is largely a matter of taking thought; Realism, with its semi-scientific study of reality, can also be pursued, as by Scott, even, or Charles Reade or Zola, with notebooks; but the third ingredient, Romanticism, spontaneous feeling, the release of the Unconscious—can this wild growth too be cultivated? Good love poems, said Pope's friend Walsh, require that a man should be in love, to write them, and out of love again to correct them. But who can *will* to be in love?

Yet something can be done, I think, to cultivate even Romantic spontaneity. It is at least possible to avoid repressing it, to refrain from fussy over-precision. Castiglione makes a certain recklessness part of perfect manners. Luther, who was not overmuch concerned with good manners, notices, "when I am angry, I can pray well and preach well". "One must let one's pen trot as it will," writes Mme de Sévigné, "la mienne a toujours la bride sur le cou." The Prince de Ligne, defining *amabilité*, besides gaiety and grace and a dozen other qualities, insists on "de la négligence". They were wiser than Lord Chesterfield, who boasted that for forty years he had never used a word without reflecting if there were not a better one. I remember Mr Yeats once telling how his father warned him to write "like a gentleman"—that is, with a certain care-free ease. Stevenson has urged that a writer should alternately work hard and

play; and that his best work will be done as play. Ruskin was equally certain that the best work is done easily, though only after painful apprenticeship. He might have instanced Dryden, whose later verse partly owes the masterly grace of its couplets to the thousands he had previously written in largely detestable dramas; or the Rossettis, who wrote so well partly as the result of composing endless sonnets to *bouts-rimés* as a children's game; or Sainte-Beuve, whose *Lundis* were so good, it has been said, because he had no time to spoil them. Anatole France, though he put his own work through eight sets of proofs, regretted that Flaubert did not do some journalism which would have compelled him to write fast. Another countryman of Flaubert's has told me that his letters are better written than the novels that cost such agony. I find it hard to believe in any style more perfect than that of *Madame Bovary*; but it is significant that this other opinion should be possible.

In fact, your art will seem natural, when it has become second nature. Even in tennis, many must have noticed how conscious concentration can never give the effectiveness of an instinctive stroke. Concentrated effort may help by long practice to build up this reflex skill; it can never equal it. And with mental problems or invention it is a commonplace that unconscious incubation can work wonders, where deliberate brain-racking brings not an idea, only a headache. Ideas, indeed, often seem to come creeping out like rabbits, in the stillness of idle meditation or when the attention is absorbed by some quite different book or task. So that Scott found it always better to have two or even a dozen irons in the fire at once.

No doubt this can be exaggerated. It is easy to dream too much. The Romantics often did. "L'artiste", writes Alain, "*doit méditer en poussant son outil.*" But this also is too simple a generalization. Artists differ. Rousseau could never compose with pen in hand, nor Chateaubriand without. The wisest way was surely Virgil's, who began each day with fifty lines written in haste and ended with five polished at leisure. But the fact remains: men can cultivate spontaneity instead of deliberately cramping it. This truth at least the Romantics have taught us. We are not wise if we deny ourselves this power of being wiser than we know.

It follows that it is also wiser to avoid too much criticism and self-criticism, that influenza of modern intellectuals—pale library-Hamlets who can never shut their querrying eyes and leap. Amiel wails that he has hamstrung himself by too much of it. Flaubert echoes him. Rémy de Gourmont denounces passionately the fatuity of Apollo's injunction "Know thyself". They too exaggerate. But the danger is real. How many modern poets have sunk to become critics and never risen again!

But can we do more than this to preserve Romance as well as spontaneity, even in this age of prose and science? I think so. But here success depends on a view of life and a way of living; on a certain sanity and a certain health, dependent in their turn upon each other.

First, for the view of life: science, it is true, has destroyed the Dryad. The fairy-ring it has proved to be the work, not of fairies, but of fungi. And so Keats quite

understandably drank confusion to Newton who had ungoddessed the rainbow; as he laments in *Lamia*,

For the sage,
 Let spear-grass and the spiteful thistle wage
 War on his temples. Do not all charms fly
 At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
 There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
 We know her woof, her texture; she is given
 In the dull catalogue of common things.
 Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
 Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
 Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
 Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
 The tender-person'd *Lamia* melt into a shade.¹

But Science, going further, has partly restored what she took away. The rainbow, she has said, is not a winged goddess; it is a matter of light-waves; Iris is a myth. But, going further, she has added: "But the waves also are a myth, a symbol, a way of schematizing certain sensations we feel and measure". As the world about us becomes more and more an unsubstantial pageant of dreams, our dreams become again, relatively, much more substantial. The Aphrodite and Artemis of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides cannot ever be as real again to men as they were to Greek piety; but, as marvellously vivid symbols of passion and the hatred of passion, they remain, even now, as real for us as a Universe that has itself become only a dance of phantom formulae on the

¹ It is surprising to find even Voltaire feeling this:

On a banni les démons et les fées:
 Sous la raison les grâces étouffées
 Livrent nos cœurs à l'insipidité.
 Le raisonnement tristement s'accrédite;
 On court hélas! après la vérité;
 Ah, croyez-moi, l'erreur a son mérite.

points of dial needles. Man cannot bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades nor loose the bands of Orion; but man has named them and his own faculties collaborate to give them all the qualities they seem to possess. As the flaming walls of Lucretius' world crumble and fall to dust, we are forced back into the straitened central citadel of our own sensations. There the Spirits of the Pities, the Spirits Ironical of Hardy's *Dynasts* remain symbols as true as the casualty lists of Trafalgar and Austerlitz—and much more living. Well might Hardy, in his marvellous old age, write on the one hand lines on Relativity:

That there's no time, no space, no motion,
Nor rathe, nor late,
Nor square, nor straight,
But just a sort of bending ocean;

and at the same time lines on the relativity of Relativity itself:

If I have seen one thing
It is the passing preciousness of dreams;
That aspects are within us.

The Science of the nineteenth century seemed to expel Poetry with a brandished test-tube; the Science of the twentieth reopens the door to her with a bow. To quote again from a letter of Hardy's in 1901: "I do not think there will be any permanent revival of the old transcendental ideals; but I think there may gradually be developed an Idealism of Fancy; that is, an idealism in which fancy is no longer tricked out and made to masquerade as belief, but is frankly and honestly accepted as an imaginative solace in the lack of any substantial solace to be found in life." We may recall that other great writer of our time, as obsessed as Hardy with Time

and Transience—the author of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*—and remember how, sitting in the restaurant at Rivebelle, Proust suddenly sees it as a mediaeval universe, its round tables as planets, its waiters as other heavenly bodies wheeling in their orbits, its *caissières* as two witches busily performing the astrological calculations that keep this celestial world in its courses, clear of catastrophe; and suddenly he pities the other diners who are absorbed, not in such fantasies, but their menus or their bills. This is, after all, only the attitude of Blake with his double vision, seeing a thistle as a greybeard by the wayside, the sun as a heavenly host crying Holy, Holy, Holy!

Yet there is a difference also; and it seems to me important to guard against extravagance in this view of life and literature. For it has been recently argued that, all science and knowledge being merely a methodical mythology, truth only matters or means anything in practical affairs, such as avoiding a motor-bus, where error means broken ribs. Poetry, it is urged, remains completely free of fact. Different poems are the means of assuming different “emotional attitudes”; and the more the merrier. Each is a different drug, giving a different dream; a new enchanted cigarette in a foggy world where all is smoke. The literary connoisseur can become all things to all gods; literature serves as a sort of combined camel and mirage to carry him across the Waste Land of modern life. It is very curious, this latest revival of Romanticism in a mystical disguise.

Such a divorce of literature from practical living seems to me rather dangerous mysticism. Literature, like life, is still vitally concerned with truth and falsehood, fact and fiction. There is always a motor-bus somewhere on

the landscape. Even poetic "attitudes" have their own consequences, like any other event. We may carry the Universe inside our own skulls; it remains no less relentless. To let the reality-principle be intoxicated by the imagination is still just as unhealthy for life and letters as to let the romancing imagination be stamped out by a slavish sense of reality.

For even sensations lead to other sensations. Pursuit of the sensation of being drunk leads to the sensation of having a headache. Pursuit of the sensations of Romantic ecstasy has often led to other sensations of abject misery. The literature we read moulds, insensibly but inevitably, our sense of values; our sense of values moulds all we do and are. "Let me make the songs of a country", said Fletcher of Saltoun, "and let who will make its laws." Plato would have been inclined to agree. Imagine your thistle by the wayside is an old gentleman, if you like; but if you then drop pennies into its hat you will be wasting your money. Let the moth desire the star; safer, very often, than desiring candles; but let it remember something of astronomical distances also, like the charming eighteenth-century Earl of Albemarle, our ambassador at Paris, who, seeing his Lolotte gazing up at a star, said to her: "*Ne la regardez pas tant, ma chère; je ne sçaurois vous la donner.*" That too is poetry. It is also sense. I loathe this view of literature as a shelf of bottles each with a different brand of alcohol inside, on which to soak in secret. I like Blake often; but I like Hardy better. He did not muddle one kind of dreaming with another. I like minds that have also in them a spirit ironic that refuses to be too much swept away—like Sheridan, when he spoilt Burke's histrionic flinging of

a dagger large as a carving knife on the floor of the House of Commons with the dry query—"Where's the fork?"

Let fact be fact and life the thing it can
And play no tricks upon thy soul, O man.

Those lines of Clough, poor Romantic who was so afraid of the tricks of romantic intoxication that he lived an unhappily sober life, still keep their truth. Clough forewent a good deal; but, to twist another phrase of his, "'Tis better to have thought and lost than never to have thought at all." Play tricks with your imagination by all means; but know when they are tricks.

All great artists, thought Michelangelo, should have some practice in architecture. It is an excellent antidote to "emotional attitudes". Try certain architectural attitudes for what you build and the laws of gravity will inexorably break your neck and other people's. To me the pleasure of literature is double—sharing a writer's experience, and comparing it with my own. And the pleasure is keenest when a voice within me cries not only "How fine!" but also "How true!" That is why Hardy is to me, as a poet, worth many Shelleys. Hardy was a master builder, who had built houses that stood; whereas Shelley's handling of material things only landed him at the bottom of the Gulf of Spezzia. A sense of reality is far from being everything; but it remains for me a very great thing, even in imaginative literature.

In fine, Romanticism has been condemned as lacking alike truth and health. It can be answered that all "truths" are mere sets of symbols for the unknowable; what I dream, exists for me as much as the Bank of England or the wetness of water. I have tried to suggest

that this defence in its turn goes overfar. Some of our symbols of the hidden It behind will work, but others will not. And even in literature I have a preference—an aesthetic preference as well as a practical one—for those that do seem to me to work. A poem like Wordsworth's which praises woods as better teachers of conduct than all the sages, moves me less—other things being equal, such as style and melody—than a poem like Hardy's¹ which expresses a revulsion from this ruthless wrestle of wooden serpents for light and life, back to humanity with its kindlier loyalties. I cannot help preferring the second. And I do not want to help preferring the second. I believe its vision of phenomena is really saner and truer in the sense that it will work better in life. And I think such a preference for "truth" is a healthy instinct. I like such things; and I like to like them. (I regret all these first persons; but I speak of

¹ And yet a modern critic can write superciliously of Hardy: "His frequent psychological accuracy has almost persuaded us of his philosophical. But he thought Time mattered, for poem after poem is full of the sense that a later experience can prove an earlier experience false. The lyric tradition of our poetry was wiser; the Elizabethan poets whose ladies had been false did not burden the universe but, more correctly, their intellectual judgments with the mistake". (This is a curious dogma: there was an Elizabethan called William Shakespeare, for example, who wrote certain *Sonnets* tolerably full of invectives against both Time and the order of mundane things.) "Nor did they think their second moments more real than their first; they thought them different and less agreeable." This is, in fact, the doctrine of "emotional attitudes" carried a stage further. Now, even if one does fall under a motor-bus, it does not matter. The moment when one is reduced to jelly is no more "real" than the moment previous when one seemed safe; it is "merely different and less agreeable". This is consoling. What matter if bank-notes are forged? No "later experience can prove an earlier experience false". And the author of this fantasy taxes Hardy with being excessively "romantic"! This critic is sure that Time does not "matter"; Time is more than likely to return the compliment.

myself, as speaking only for myself, to avoid being egotistic.)

But this is perfectly compatible with admiration for a great deal of Romanticism. Much Romantic work has been mentally or emotionally dishonest; much has been, though genuine, yet morbid and hysterical. But attacks on it as "untrue" are often merely unintelligent dislike of unfamiliar symbols. Thus Rossetti jibbed at Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung* because, he said, he could not be interested in people who turned into dragons; as if we did not meet every year people who have turned or are turning into dragons, just as grimly as Fafnir brooding on his hoarded gold! If the symbol works, well and good; if the poet realizes, as Morris and Hardy did, that it is only a symbol and a dream, still better. Those who denounce all Romanticism indiscriminately are surely as extreme as if they thought algebraic equations in a , b , and c became false when stated in terms of x , y , and z . The magic potions of Tristram or Sigurd, which kindle new love or kill the old, are no less "real" or "true" than the fickle passions and infidelities of the latest novel. And if the Romantic tends to prefer symbols that are ancient, counters that are moss-grown, that is not blind caprice. Novelties may tickle the conscious curiosity; but the deeper levels are stirred by older impulses—things whose echoes go back to the childhood of the individual and the race. Modernity may bring new awakenings; but old wine and old memories bring dreams. The religious have realized that; it is not by chance that priests have still used stone knives long after the ages of bronze and iron had dawned.

Without any intellectual thimble-rigging, any striking

of emotional poses in the void, life can still be romantic for the Romantic, poetic for the poetic; still, in Walpole's wise phrase, "a comedy for those who think and a tragedy for those who feel". There is still a notebook written by Napoleon in his schooldays, of which the closing words are "Sainte-Hélène, petite île". Fate has not lost, with the centuries, its deadly gift of irony.

It is a question of seeing life without being hypnotized by the superstitions of our age, with its mechanisms and its fanaticisms; or reverting, either, to the superstitions of the past.

Men grow too old for love, maybe,
Men grow too old for lies;
But I shall not grow too old to see
Enormous night arise;
A cloud that is larger than the world
And a monster made of eyes.¹

And again—

But now a great thing in the street
Seems any human nod,
Where shift in strange democracy
The million masks of God.
In youth I sought the golden flower
Hidden in wood or wold,
But I am come to autumn
When all the leaves are gold.¹

But truth is not enough without health as well. "Mens sana in corpore sano" is not merely an ideal; it is a statement of fact. For though it is not impossible, it is not common to find sanity incarnate in a sick frame. Most of us learn by experience when we are depressed, to look to our bodies, at least partly, for the cause; and

¹ G. K. Chesterton.

for the cure. Happiness is so largely a matter of mere vitality. "Mighty poets in their misery dead" has proved only too often a true saying; and mighty poets in their misery living also. The Goncourt idea of the value to a writer of being ill is not, I think, wholly false—the mind may triumph over the body—but a dangerous exaggeration. The mortifier of the flesh is merely another kind of drug-fiend. Eating too little, as the religious long since discovered, is a means to intoxication as well as drinking too much. But though sickness may bring more and vividder dreams, the dreams themselves are likely to be sick. If Greek art is perfect in its health and balance as no other art has been, that is, I believe, partly because Greek life was itself healthy and soundly balanced between body and mind, between action and thought. So with the best of the Icelandic sagas; so with Chaucer and the Ballads and Shakespeare and Ronsard. It is not to bloody revivals of Aztec gods among the aridities of Mexico or to the Nordic orgies of Nazidom, but to a happier Europe, in the first place, that it seems to me reasonable to look forward for a time when this Trinity—Classicism, Romanticism, Realism—may perhaps meet again in one—a Europe where men are bred for quality, not quantity; where the population is far smaller and less town-minded and town-hearted; where men are freed from the drudgery of mindless labour and Nature from the hideousness of industrialism. And with that new leisure it might be possible again for the mass of mankind to become in some sense creative. Creation—be it only of a hencoop—seems to me half the secret of the good life. It is the sterile, uncreative, critical or merely absorbent mind that is cursed like the barren fig-tree of Israel. The mentally passive are on

their way to become mental patients. But such active originality means individualism—the very opposite of the mass-movements which are bastardizing the populations of modern Italy and Germany to a level below a healthy Polynesian. And individuality is greatly helped by a certain amount of solitude—above all by being alone with Nature, like the Wordsworth of the *Prelude*. A garden-suburb England is only too likely to produce an anaemic suburbanity. True civilization needs desert wildernesses to balance its cities.

But though it is desirable that we should think of Utopias, unless human progress is to be as blind as an Indian file of caterpillars processing round a flower-pot, it is undesirable to think too much of them. For though we may dream of our Platonic republics, it is not we who shall live in them; even if anything remotely like them ever comes to be. The individual has still to make his terms with 1936.

And even in 1936 a measured Romanticism seems to me better than that cynicism of the intellectuals of a few years back, which was often genuine, and yet not intelligent.

Grey house and grey house and after that grey house
Another house as grey and steep and still:
An old cat tired of playing with a mouse,
A sick child tired of chasing down the hill.
Shuffle and hurry, idle feet and slow,
Grim face and merry face, so ugly all!
Why do you hurry? Where is there to go?
Why are you shouting? Who is there to call?...
If this distaste I hold for fools is such,
Shall I not spit upon myself as well?
Do I not eat and drink and smile as much,
Do I not fatten also in this hell?¹

¹ Iris Tree.

This is eloquently passionate. Yet, with such a view of the world, is the fault wholly the world's? Life was still harder and grimmer in saga Iceland; but the vitality, the zest for life were also there—a Romanticism, intensely restrained, yet real. Life was still madder in the France of Montaigne; yet that brave smiling sceptic keeps in his heart a romantic adoration for the heroes of his Plutarch. Without it he would not have kept his own heart, if one may so put it, "si gaillard et si gai". Life was still bleaker for the disillusioned old age of Hardy, with his pessimism deepened by the War and by the Peace of 1919; and yet Hardy remains to the end one of the greatest of all English romancers despite his incomparable honesty of mind.

If I have seen one thing
It is the passing preciousness of dreams.

It is the same with his contemporary and fellow-pessimist, the greatest classical scholar of the age; so far at first sight from *Jude the Obscure*, yet likewise a poet of pastoral England, of Shropshire as the other of Wessex—A. E. Housman. With him too beauty did not forget the bitterness of reality, but his realism did not grovel on its belly in the squalor of the dust; his Muse remains queenly as Cleopatra, while she takes the asp of Truth to her dreaming heart.

Tell me not here, it needs not saying,
What tune the enchantress plays
In aftermaths of soft September
Or under blanching mays,
For she and I were long acquainted
And I knew all her ways.

On russet floors, by waters idle
The pine lets fall its cone;
The cuckoo shouts all day at nothing
In leafy dells alone;
And traveller's joy beguiles in autumn
Hearts that have lost their own.

And so I do not understand the mentality that proclaims: "There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters." It seems to me that there is certainly much to be said for it in real life, though within reason. For it is from a Romantic sense of life lived as tragedy, that a character like the mother of the Bonapartes draws much of its strength. After Waterloo, she offered her son her whole fortune. "But you will be ruined!" "What does it matter? When I have nothing, I will take a staff and beg an alms for 'the mother of Napoleon'!" And again, after the end at St Helena: "My son died miserably. My other children are proscribed. My grandchildren who promised best seem doomed to disappear. I am old, forsaken, without glory, without honour—and I would not change places with the first queen in the world." No doubt this generous wine of dream and pride is dangerous. It had helped her son to ruin Europe. It is better suited to days of stress and crisis, than of peace. It is the fuel of wars. But it is not a force for desk-rats to despise.

Yet it is in literature, not in life, that Romanticism seems to me, along with much rubbish, to have produced its truest triumphs. Its immortals still man the walls of every library in Western Europe. The Romantic Revival may look pallid now. The Sleeping Beauty sleeps again. She is not dead.

The Roman Empire likewise declined and fell; even to-day Italy is again in the hands of the barbarian. Yet the Roman Empire had its Eternal City. Rome will be there when its latest barbarians too have passed and silence fallen above their settling dust. So too Romance, however its flowers may wither for a season, has still its roots deep in human nature, its great trees that will long outlive ourselves. Heine's fir and palm still stand upon their everlasting hills. "Le romanesque est mort: vive le romanesque!"

CHAPTER IV

A ROMANTIC CRITIC

COLERIDGE is, in England at least, the master-critic of Romanticism; Imagination is its master-spirit; and Coleridge's theory of the Imagination, divorcing it from the Fancy, remains one of his most famous speculations. Indeed it has been treated in a recent book¹ as of vital importance to the spiritual future of the human race—a step “of the same type as that which took Galileo into the modern world”. “Neither Coleridge's grounds for the distinction nor his applications of it have as yet entered our general intellectual tradition. When they do, the order of our universes will have been changed.” In the face of such an impending cataclysm it may seem rash still to doubt. And yet I cannot help feeling, both here and elsewhere, that Coleridge remains an example of how much our Romantic criticism, while it gained in sensibility, tended to lose in sense.

Ancient critics were not greatly interested in the nature of Imagination, though it bothered ancient philosophers. As in mediaeval English, the creative writer was a “maker”, ποιητής; and the things he made were suspect. For what difference was there between fiction and deceit? The old Solon could upbraid Thespis, the father of drama, for “getting up on a trestle and telling lies”, with the same simplicity that has led modern countryfolk to abjure summer-time as falsifying

¹ Dr I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934).

the hours of God. The distinction between the imagination that reproduces past impressions and the imagination that produces new ones, was not arrived at in a day.¹

Faced with the problem of how the first carpenter thought of the first table, Plato built up that strange and obscure system of Ideas, which enabled him to degrade the artist below the artificer, on the ground that the painter of a pictured table produced a mere secondary shadow of the carpenter's primary shadow of ideal reality—the poor imitation of an imitation.²

To this Aristotle replied that art was no doubt "reproduction" (*mimesis*); but so far from being a pale copy of a copy it was, on the contrary, nearer to the ideal, the general, the universal; so that the imaginative poet could claim to be more of a philosopher than the historian of actual events. It was by no mere waxwork representation, but its power to reproduce the *feelings* of real life

¹ It is thus misleading, I think, to say (*Coleridge on Imagination*, p. 24) that "the most ancient sense" of imagination is "imagination contrasted with imitation". *Imaginatio* and *imago* come, on the contrary, from the same root as *imitatio* (*ic*, *aic*: cf. *εἰκὼν*, *aequus*, *iniquus*, *aemulus*—for *aic-mulus*). *Imaginatio* means (1) the impression made by a phenomenon, as by a seal on wax; (2) the reconstruction, in the memory, of such an impression; (3) the construction, from past impressions, of some new image. Similarly the ancestor of "Fancy", the Greek *φαντασία*, means (1) an appearance (from the root *pha*, "light"); (2) the faculty of imagining. Thus in origin "Fancy" and "Imagination" are close cousins, with no difference in their principal meaning.

² The Socrates of the *Ion* does indeed offer the poetic imagination a bouquet, suggesting that it is a divine madness; and the poets of posterity have gratefully accepted it, failing to discern that there was a wasp under the flowers. The poets are no doubt "possessed", is Plato's real conclusion; but the spirit that possesses them may be good or evil, truthful or deceiving; what use, then, are poets? They are delirious dervishes, whose dreams come as easily through the Gate of Ivory as of Horn.

that music won from Aristotle the title, astonishing to us, of "most mimetic of all arts".

Another advance made by Aristotle was his recognition of the importance in literature of the power of combining images; the gift of metaphor, "of seeing likenesses", is for him a real stamp of genius, born and not made. Metaphor may seem to us only one of many arrows in the writer's quiver; authors like Swift have done almost entirely without; and it looks arbitrary to lay so much stress upon it. But it becomes less odd and arbitrary, I think, if we recall the enormous part that clinical experience has found played by symbolism and disguise in the workings of the Unconscious and of dreams.

The materialism of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius was also puzzled by the Imagination. Vision and visualization, for Lucretius, are both caused by actual films, of extreme tenuity, radiated in endless succession from all bodies. We have conceptions of the gods. Therefore, said Epicurus, the gods do exist. It would have suited his general scheme far better to eliminate them. However, he could see nothing for it but to admit them and then pension them off, where they could do no harm, in "the lucid interspace of world and world". But centaurs and such chimeras he would not have. In this case we are, he said, deceived by the images of men and horses colliding and telescoping before they penetrate our minds. (No doubt when television becomes common, if the international anarchy of the ether continues, we shall be able to watch this process of Epicurus happening under our eyes; just as to-day the notes of Hitler and Haydn and jazz all unite to typify our present civilization of scientific chimpanzees.)

Why did not Epicurus explain in the same way our conception of the gods? It is hard to say. Perhaps he did not think of it. No wonder opponents like Cicero made great fun of so materialistic a theory of Imagination. And yet this idea of the amalgamation of images in the mind, obvious as it looks now, was a step in the right direction, along "the Road to Xanadu".

We should expect to find more about the artistic imagination in "Longinus", *On Great Writing* (first cent. A.D.?). But that author contents himself with saying that "the first and foremost thing in great literature is the power of forming great conceptions"—things independent of the words they are written in, like the silence of Ajax in Hades; and, again, that such literary greatness is "the echo of a great personality". Too much, again, has been made of a passage in Philostratus (third cent. A.D.), where Apollonius of Tyana, that ancient Paracelsus, discusses Imagination (φαντασία) with the naked sages he visited in Egypt (VI, 19). The Greek finds fault with the beast-gods of Egypt by contrast with the superhuman Zeus of Phidias or Aphrodite of Praxiteles. "How did your artists know what the gods were like?" sneers a nettled Egyptian. "By going and seeing them in Heaven?" "It was Imagination," replies Apollonius, "a more cunning artist than Imitation. For Imitation can only fashion what it has seen, but Imagination what it has not seen, also; conceiving it on the analogy of what exists (ὑποθίσσεται γὰρ αὐτὸ πρὸς τὴν ἀναφορὰν τοῦ ὄντος)."¹

¹ The version of Mr E. F. Carrith in his *Philosophies of Beauty*—"imagination goes on to what it has not seen, which it will assume as the standard of the reality"—seems to me completely out of relation to the Greek; similarly his rendering of τέχνη in Plotinus, v, 8, 1. The word

But it hardly needed a prophet to tell us this. The Muses had already made this distinction, in essence, between the productive and the reproductive imagination, when they met Hesiod on Helicon a thousand years before, singing

Many things false our lips like truth can utter,
But true things, too, at will our tongues can tell.

The fact is, I think, that the Greeks with their strong "reality-principle" were less interested in Imagination than later generations with their craving for new inventions in a staler world and for wish-fulfilling dreams in a tormented one. Thus Greek poetry and drama were largely content with lovely variations of that imaginative mythology whose origins were lost even for them; their best prose concentrated not on fiction, but on oratory, history, and philosophy; and we have seen how they distrusted the fantastic and far-fetched—an incident like men turning into swine, or even a metaphor like "holding the mirror up to life". The Greek mind, when serious, was usually sober. For wilder flights we must look to Aristophanes, whose Muse of Comedy was a younger daughter, licensed in extravagance; to Plato, who is untypical; to Lucian and the novelists, who are late.

In English criticism Imagination and Fancy long remained the same; in Puttenham, who writes indifferently of "disordered phantasies" and "monstrous imaginations"; in Shakespeare, for whom Antony is "Nature's piece 'gainst fancy" (just as his Cleopatra

means simply "knowledge of his art", and might apply equally to a cobbler. The art in this case does involve imagination; but that is another matter. Like later Platonists, Plotinus here adds little to his master.

correspondingly recalls a picture where "we see the fancy outwork Nature"), while

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact;

in Sir William Temple, who speaks of "imagination or fancy"; in Addison, who strangely supposes both alike to be based entirely on past *visual* impressions. But a distinction does appear in Dryden's Preface to *Annus Mirabilis*, where he divides Wit or Imagination into Invention, which invents; Fancy, which varies and arranges these materials provided by Invention; and Elocution, which moulds the style.

But Dryden's idea of Fancy as a part of Imagination does not seem to have had much success. The two words lived on side by side; with a tendency, I think, for Fancy, helped by its sister-words "fantasy" and "fantastic", by its other meanings, like "love", and perhaps by its very sound, to seem the weaker vessel, the more frivolous, capricious and feminine of the two.

Then came Coleridge, to put them firmly asunder. "Imagination I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and primary agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles

to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

FANCY, on the contrary, ~~has~~ has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space."¹

Perhaps it would not be unfair to illustrate this obscure and contorted statement as follows. Imagine human minds as equipped with radio and television sets. The Infinite I AM transmits; the primary imagination² within us reproduces that shadow-show we call "Reality". God creates; we re-create. He conceives; we perceive.

The secondary imagination, on the other hand—what we usually call "imagination" simply—can stage similar dream-dramas in its own studio. Like a lesser deity, the poetic mind says "Let there be delight"; and there is delight.

Fancy, on the other hand, can only make patchwork screens—*collages*—with fixed photographs from the store of memory. It can combine new patterns; but it works with "fixities and definites".³

It is like the difference, we might say, between the novelist who creates a Don Quixote or an Uncle Toby and the novelist who fits into his story "portraits" of his

¹ *Biog. Lit.* xiii.

² It will be seen that this use of "imagination" for our power of *apprehending* the universe about us is a highly unusual one which helps, I think, to cause confusion when we pass on to imagination in the ordinary sense.

³ Coleridge seems to exaggerate, when he talks as if any mental impressions could really retain this fixity, like stones of a mosaic; they are rather wisps of cloud, perpetually reshaped by the shifting winds of the Unconscious.

acquaintances: between the writer who builds a complete new world of his own, like Dickens, and the writer who merely reshuffles autobiographical experiences.

Elsewhere Coleridge calls Imagination the "Esemplastic Power", because it produces new unities.¹ It is "the greatest faculty of the human mind". It is "the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, and by a sort of fusion to force many into one"; the power "of combining many circumstances into one moment of thought to produce that ultimate end of human thought and human feeling, unity, and thereby the reduction of the spirit to its principle and fountain, who is alone truly *One*".

Now with theories of the universe at large we are not here concerned. This idea that the "ultimate end of all human thought and human feeling" is "unity" may be the profoundest of truths or it may be mere homesickness for the womb—that is not here the question: the only point at issue is—does Coleridge's distinction work with literature?

Leaving on one side, then, the reduction of the spirit

¹ It is perhaps typical of Coleridge's absences of taste that he should coin such a horror; and of his absences of mind that the coinage should be false at that. "Esemplastic", could it exist, would mean "into-in-moulding", not "into-one-moulding". Elsewhere he makes the necessary correction to "es-eno-plastic"; but mends his Greek only to flounder in German: "How excellently the German *Einbildungskraft* (power in imagination) expresses this prime and loftiest faculty—In-eins-bildung!" Needless to say the "Ein-" means "into", not "one": "sich einbilden" = "to introduce an image into one's own mind". One is reminded of his amazing statement that "Epic" comes from "ἔπος, *sequor*" (instead of ἔπος, "word", "speech", "tale"), in support of his highly questionable distinction between Epic and Drama. These pedantries are little in themselves: but they are symptomatic, I think, of the way the clutch is apt to slip in Coleridge's mind (cf. his famous misuse of ἔσθησε).

to its fountain, whatever that may mean, let us turn to his few examples—all too few—of the literary Imagination.¹ Its working may be:

A. Passionate. As when Lear “spreads the feeling of ingratitude and cruelty over the very elements of Heaven”; or the Shakespeare of the *Sonnets* says of his indifference to all the birds and flowers of spring in his love’s absence—

As with your shadow, I with these did play.

Or B. Tranquil. Here Imagination may unify in two ways:

(1) It seems to reduce a multitude of phenomena to one, as “when we open our eyes upon an extended prospect” from a hilltop; or a number of successive events to an instant, as when Adonis leaves Venus:

Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky,
So glides he in the night from Venus’ eye.

Or (2) When it impresses the stamp of human feelings on non-human objects:

Lo! herè the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high.²

We have here, in fact, a new Three Unities—in passion, in extension or duration, and in humanization. They make a queer trio.

Fancy, on the other hand, assembles her images, it appears, like a bower-bird collecting objects bright or odd; and arranges them, unchanged in themselves, about her door. Or, to change the illustration, she makes

¹ See T. M. Raysor, *Coleridge’s Shakespearean Criticism*, I, 212ff., *Biog. Lit.* xv.

² This seems merely a calmer repetition of A. In either case natural objects are *humanized*.

barren marriages of ideas, which do not, like those blessed by Imagination, produce a new creation. Or again, one might say, Fancy produces a physical mixture, as of sulphur and iron filings, where either element remains intact; whereas the heat of Imagination creates a new compound, like iron sulphide, which this time no magnet can separate.

This theory of Imagination and Fancy as quite different things has been a good deal criticized—by Walter Pater, by Professor Lascelles Abercrombie, by Professor Livingston Lowes. And they in their turn have been severely reproved by Dr Richards, who likens their utterances to those of a schoolboy or “a Schoolmaster’s Report”. “Pater’s is amateur’s work, mere nugatory verbiage—empty, rootless and backgroundless postulation—unless we put into it just that very piece of patient laborious analysis that it pretends so airily to dismiss and surpass.” To which Pater might have gently murmured that perhaps the “verbiage” was not altogether on one side.

But it remains to test, even at the risk of excommunication, how far this theory will really work in practice. Thus as an example of Fancy Coleridge quotes from *Venus and Adonis*:¹

Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
A lily prisoned in a jail of snow,
Or ivory in an alabaster band;
So white a friend engirts so white a foe.

These similes, he says, bring together objects “dissimilar in the main, by some one point or more of likeness distinguished”. Adonis’ hand is white; so is a lily or

¹ Raysor, I, 212-13.

ivory. Venus' hand is white; so is snow or alabaster. And Venus' hand imprisons her love's as a jail imprisons a prisoner.

But even at this point discrepancies already begin to arise. For Dr Richards the last line is an example, not of Fancy, but of Imagination. For Venus' hand is a friend in *two* senses: (*a*) she loves Adonis; (*b*) she would have saved his life, had he listened and not gone hunting. This double sense produces, for Dr Richards, "consiliences and reverberations".¹ Coleridge, on the other hand, allowed Fancy "one point *or more* of likeness"; and quotes the whole passage as fanciful. Which is right? Can we honestly detect quite a different activity of mind in this fourth line from that at work in the other three?

On the other hand this, we are told, is a case of Imagination:

Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky,
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.

Here, says Coleridge, are combined a number of images and feelings—the beauty of Adonis, the rapidity of his flight, the yearning helplessness of Venus. And Dr Richards discovers a whole host of other "links of relevance"—Venus is like the night in being darkened by her sense of loss; Adonis is like the star in being a giver of light, an influence, "a destiny"; the sky, but now a source of light, has become a source of ruin; and so forth.

To some readers this will seem a highly fanciful picture of Imagination. Is this idea of the astrological influence of stars really relevant? Or is it a piece of

¹ Coleridge on *Imagination*, p. 84.

“metaphysical” ingenuity, confounding the beauty of simplicity by its covetousness? Personally, I find the lines call up two simple visual images in succession—a starry sky whence falls a meteor; and then the young Adonis vanishing in the shadows. To cram in references to horoscopes and the like seems to me like spoiling the reflection of that starlit heaven in a quiet lake by pitching pebbles into it. I recognize that there are “nine and sixty ways” of reading, as well as of writing, “tribal lays”: but I am not tempted to change in the hope of more “consiliences and reverberations”—

Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.

When Cyrus the Persian felt insulted by the River Gyndes because it had drowned one of his sacred white horses, he swore to break its pride and wasted a whole campaign splitting it into three hundred and sixty channels, till a woman could cross without wetting her knee; many modern minds seem to think they honour the great streams of poetry by a similar process.

Contrast this other starlit scene from Homer, as rendered by Tennyson:

As when in heaven the stars about the moon
Look beautiful, when all the winds are laid,
And every height comes out, and jutting peak
And valley, and the immeasurable heavens
Break open to their highest, and all the stars
Shine, and the Shepherd gladdens in his heart;
So many a fire between the ships and stream
Of Xanthus blazed.

Here the only point of likeness is that between many twinkling fires and many twinkling stars; the rest, as

so often in Homeric similes, is a divine bounty, little tied by "links of relevance". Is this, then, a case of Fancy, not Imagination? The work of a lower faculty? For myself, I would always have given the whole of *Venus and Adonis*, except its hunted hare and its dive-dapper and its snail, for these few lines; even before I came to see how magnificent is Homer's contrast between the lurid darkness of the battlefield and that happy Wordsworthian shepherd on his moonlit fells.

Homer cares so little in general for "cross-connections" that he will compare the Trojans' clamour as they march to meet the Greeks to the windy cry of the cranes flying south to fight the pygmies; without fearing lest some too ingenious Achaean should upbraid him for suggesting that the Greek heroes in the least resembled pygmies. Or take that terrible vision of Beddoes, where pestilence-stricken air becomes

Transparent as the glass of poisoned water
Through which the drinker sees his murderer smiling.

Poisoned transparent air—poisoned transparent water—there do not seem many "links of relevance"; and yet the lines would seem to me "imaginative" even if I did not even know what the water was supposed to resemble. Who cares, again, in the great simile at the end of Arnold's *Scholar-Gipsy*, that the things compared are so "dissimilar in the main"? The *care-free* Scholar is bidden by Arnold to shun the *melancholy* modern thinker, as the *grave* Phoenician turned away from the *merry* Grecian trader out into the wild Atlantic. The "links of relevance" are thin indeed; yet are we to deny the passage Imagination?

Or consider a couplet that most would class, if they had to choose, as "Fancy":

Words are like leaves and, where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

If one likes this game of hunting for "cross-connection after cross-connection", these lines of Pope provide admirable opportunities.

Leaves are like words because:

(1) By their abundance they use up the energy which should have borne fruit.

(2) In large numbers, they obscure.

(3) They grow old and decay.

(4) They are made audible by the wind, as words by breath. They have even formed sentences, as at Dodona.

(5) They can be printed.

Fruit is like sense, because:

(1) It nourishes.

(2) It matures slowly.

(3) It is itself fruitful, and able to propagate.

(4) It is often hard to reach.

This sort of game of seeing analogies can be pursued indefinitely; does it make the passage an example of Imagination—except in the critic?

At this point I must add there seems to me a certain divergence between Coleridge and his modern interpreter. For Coleridge what mattered was the emotional *unity* that Imagination produced from multiplicity, as moonlight, he said, transfigures a whole landscape; Dr Richards, I suspect, is much more delighted intellectually by the *multiplicity* out of which that unity is pro-

duced. I doubt if Coleridge would have shared all this enthusiasm for ambiguities and "numbers of connections", or felt reassured by being told they need not be consciously noted. Coleridge, in other words, is pleased by the process which can reduce so many odd pence to a single pound; his commentator by counting over how many pence that pound contains. Dr Richards, indeed, frankly admits that he is not altogether sure nor much interested how far Coleridge would have accepted all that he has built on Coleridge's foundations. Indeed it seems natural enough that there should be a good deal of discrepancy between the pious ancestor of the Oxford Movement and this interpreter whose "Benthamite materialism", however mingled with mysticism, would have filled Coleridge with horror and consternation. *Coleridge on Imagination* contains, I feel, a certain amount of imagination on Coleridge.¹

To return, Coleridge produces certain further illustrations of his contrast between Imagination and Fancy.²

Behold yon row of pines, that shorn and bow'd
Bend from the sea-blast, seen at twilight eve.

"When a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit", he says, these lines

¹ It should be remembered that his main discussions of Fancy and Imagination in *Biographia Literaria* (1815-17) and the Lectures of 1818 were written when Coleridge had become devoutly Christian; and are much later than the passage in *The Aeolian Harp* (1795) and the letter to Thelwall in 1796 which lie nearer to the philosophy of Dr Richards. Of course one can always say "Coleridge was *not* a Christian, if he had only known"; but there remains a constant danger of muddle, when one sets out to understand the dead so much better than they understood themselves. "Il y a des esprits qui ne peuvent admettre et admirer les autres qu'en les tirant à soi."

² *Biog. Lit.* xv.

become imaginative and "rise into semblance of poetry":

Yon row of bleak and visionary pines,
By twilight glimpse discerned, mark! how they flee
From the fierce sea-blast, all their tresses wild
Streaming before them.

Corrupted by a classical education, I find myself perversely giving the preference, if any, to the quieter tone of the first passage. In the second, the trees have become "bleak and visionary", they are "by glimpse discerned" instead of "seen", and in addition we are adjured to "mark" them; but does one mark them more highly for protesting so much more?¹ If it is so imaginative to "humanize" objects, the trees in the first passage were already "shorn and bowed", as if they were men, or at least animals. Do their new "tresses" really add so much? Is this sort of poetic anthropomorphism necessarily so imaginative? Are we then to admire for its imagination the winter of Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, which comes

To glaze the Lake, to bridle up the Floods,
And periwig with snow the bald-pate Woods?

Surely this is, if anything, "fanciful"; just as Coleridge classes Cowley as "fanciful", in contrast to Milton who is "imaginative". Take, on the other hand, Housman's

Fall, winter, fall; for he,
Prompt hand and headpiece clever,
Has woven a winter-robe,
And made of earth and sea
His overcoat for ever
And wears the turning globe.

¹ Incidentally, it is not clear that the second version has acquired many more "cross-connections" or "links of relevance" or "super-numerary meanings".

Is this not "imaginative", as well as fanciful? Yet what "cross-connections", what "links of relevance" are there between "earth and *sea*" and an overcoat, except that the buried feel no more cold?¹

Or again consider Wordsworth's example of the contrast:

The dews of the evening most carefully shun,
They are the tears of the sky for the loss of the sun.
(Chesterfield.)

Sky lowered, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completion of the mortal sin. (Milton.)

The comparison is equally simple in either case; the sky weeps for the sun, or for the sin; are there more "consiliences and reverberations" in one passage than the other? Is the enormous difference between them a matter of (poetic phrase!) "secondary and tertiary co-implications among their possibilities of interpretation"?

And, after all, why this constant preoccupation with similes and metaphors? One would think Imagination consisted chiefly in implying *A* is like *B* in $n + 1$ ways. For a companion-piece to Adonis' parting from Venus, as "a bright star shooteth from the sky", which is supposed to be so vastly imaginative, turn to Achilles' parting from Odysseus among the dead, consoled for a moment in his deathless melancholy by hearing of the brave deeds of his son on earth:

ψυχὴ δὲ ποδώκεος Αἰακίδαο
φοῖτα μακρὰ βιβῶσα κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα.

But the soul of swift Aeacides
With mighty strides went stalking down the mead of
asphodel.

¹ I imagine that Coleridge might have agreed. The stanza has an emotional unity, though again few "supernumerary meanings".

A mightier than Adonis is here, leaning in his giant simplicity on no "cross-references". Or recall the episode of the death of the dog Argus, after he has laid back his ears and twitched his tail at the sight of the master whose nearest and dearest failed to know him in his rags.

"Ἀργον δ' αὖ κατὰ μοῖρ' ἔλαβεν μέλανος θανάτοιο,
αὐτίκ' ἰδόντ' Ὀδυσῆα ἑικοστῷ ἐνιαυτῷ.

But the doom of death's long darkness on Argus fell at last
The day he had seen Odysseus, when the twentieth year
was past.

The dog Argus, covered with lice on his dunghill, has outlived a hundred generations of men. Why? Because he was so complex? No, because he was so simple—with the simplicity of the eternal sorrows of our dust. And that is why he will be remembered three thousand years hence, long after our paper flowers of criticism have gone the forgotten way of better things. When Coleridge pronounced that there was "nothing sublime" in Greek, he might perhaps have been better employed in learning a little more of it.

The truth is, I think, that he pursued Unity everywhere, with the eagerness of Sir Thomas Browne pursuing Quincunces, because of its mystical connection in his mind with the Unity of God and unity with God;¹

¹ How strong this strange craving for unity was in Coleridge comes out clearly in a letter to Thelwall in 1797 (quoted in J. Shawcross's edition of the *Biographia Literaria*, I, xviii): "The universe itself, what but an immense heap of little things? . . . My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something *great*, something *one* and *indivisible*. And it is only in the faith of that, that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns, give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! But in this faith *all things* counterfeit infinity." To minds without this mystical yearning it seems

while Dr Richards, regarding all our views of the universe as alike mythological, feels that the more there are, and the more complex, the merrier.

But transcendental mysticism may not be altogether helpful in building critical theories. In critical practice the ensuing theories may lead to that fatal mistake of laying down rules and judging by them. And yet perhaps the only rule in criticism is that we should never criticize by rules. "The poet", Coleridge tells us, "should paint to the imagination, not to the fancy." For Coleridge's disciple, indeed, the Imagination is no longer in itself of greater value than the Fancy; only of wider range. None the less, this notion of the surpassing preciousness of "consiliences and reverberations" leads on to a condemnation of Rupert Brooke's poetry, as contrasted with Mr Auden's or Mr Empson's, on the ground that "it has no *inside*. Its ideas and other components, however varied, are all expressed with prominence...." (How horrible! All the brutal lucidity of a Sappho or a Horace, a Herrick or a Racine!) "The as strange to want the whole universe to have one essence as to want it to have only one colour—say, bright pink.

It is no doubt possible to believe that the world about us is the Book of God, in which all phenomena are but symbols of Him; the Fancy playing with those symbols as a child that cannot read, the Imagination reading them as wholes by which in moments of vision it communicates with Him. It is possible to believe it: but why should one? Because of the wish to; and if one has not the faintest wish?

I believe, though it cannot be proved, that this mystic eagerness for unity is due ultimately to a loss of nerve. As man has grown more individual and intelligent, he has grown more divided and solitary. Men are not lemmings—

Alone the sun arises, and alone
Spring the great streams.

But at moments, realizing that "*nous sommes irrémédiablement seuls*", the mind grows sick and giddy and runs for refuge to the mystic's trance—or the totalitarian state.

reader is visiting an Exhibition of Poetic Products." It would be simple to reply that one may prefer that to an Exhibition of Raw Materials. But in judging poets arguments settle little or nothing. It is enough to point out what an enormous amount of the world's poetry, especially Greek and French, such an attitude brands as inferior with a firmness that recalls Dr Richards's observation that "the greater part of Greek tragedy as well as almost all Elizabethan Tragedy outside Shakespeare's six masterpieces" is "pseudo-tragedy". Is such exclusiveness not in danger of growing, perhaps, a little extreme? His *Practical Criticism* showed, I feel, a wiser uncertainty.

It still seems to me, then, unnecessary to assume two perfectly distinct "faculties", Fancy and Imagination. On the other hand the two words have now acquired a definite difference in common speech. Can we analyse our spontaneous use of them? What makes us call one thing "fanciful", another "imaginative"? I believe that the difference we feel lies rather in the *way* the writer applies his gifts of style and imagery—not in the powers he employs so much as in the tone and intention with which he employs them. He can use language mainly to communicate his own feelings; or mainly to excite feelings in his audience—feelings largely of admiration or astonishment at his style and ingenuity. Thus Lord Chesterfield exhibits a clever *conceit* about dew which will cause a neat click in his reader's mind; but Milton is striving to share with us his *conception* of the horror which oppressed the universe at sight of that first fatal disobedience. Chesterfield's eye is focussed on his own wit; Milton's on the horror of man's sin and God's wrath.

In fine, you may use language in two ways, as you may use glass to make a window through which others shall see the landscape of your vision; or to make a stained-glass window, which will not so much give light, or sight of something beyond, as pleasure by its own colour and pattern. You may stretch the golden wire of words to transmit a deeply felt message; or twist it into some elaborate bangle. But of course the two usages are not mutually exclusive; and there are infinite gradations. Good Metaphysical poetry, like Marvell's *Coy Mistress*, does both; bad Metaphysical poetry, like parts of his *Nunappleton House*, where distant cattle in a meadow are likened to fleas or pimples on a face, does not communicate the poet's love of the landscape, but merely his love of playing with childish "cross-connections". Dryden, before he had fully exchanged the Metaphysical follies of his youth for that gentlemanly wit which Pope was to perfect, could say of a sea-fight:

The Foe approach'd, and one, for his bold Sin,
Was sunk (as he that touch'd the Ark was slain:)
The wild Waves master'd him and suck'd him in,
And smiling *Eddies* dimpled on the Main.

Here Dryden is not concerned, like Tennyson in *The Revenge*, to fill us with the anguish and suspense and pity of a real sea-fight; he is out to draw ingenious parallels meeting only at infinity; to find likenesses between "things dissimilar in the main", that shall be precious for their very unlikeliness, as strawberries in December. Here the Foe is not really "sinning"; the English ship is not really holy; the very eddies "dimple", because the whole thing is a sham fight and a regatta. The poet is not using his wings to fly with, but to feather shuttle-

cocks. With this fanciful passage of Dryden Dr Richards has contrasted, as Imagination, the couplet of Sir John Beaumont:

Here are sands, ignoble things,
Dropt from the ruin'd sides of kings.

But here too the essential difference seems to me that the poet is trying seriously to *share* his own feelings at Westminster; till in his awed hearer there rise responsively old memories of mouldering graveyards and *Hic jacets*, memories reaching back to childhood and half lost in the mists of the Unconscious. And the sense of Unity harped on by Coleridge does tend to show itself in this kind of poetry, *because* the poet is thus sharing his own mood, bidding us gaze through his window into his world; and in so far as his state of mind at the moment and his personality in general may be expected to show a certain unity, as a magnet patterns iron filings along its lines of force, we may well feel something of that unity. We are entering into communion, not with God, but with a poet. But neither as a reader nor a writer of poetry can I by any introspection find anything more than this; though of course this may be merely my own blindness.

Tell me where is Fancy¹ bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head?

The answer seems—"In the head"; whereas with Imagination, the heart is involved also. The writer who would make us call him "imaginative", who would produce Macbeths as well as Queen Mabs, must have not only intellectual gifts, but also a personality great enough, as "Longinus" meant, to echo through his

¹ In the original context, of course, Fancy is simply "love".

style; a personality great enough to forget its audience, and often itself also, in its subject; so that, growing unselfconscious, it can draw far more freely on those stores of the Unconscious which the eighteenth century kept so over-disciplined.¹ This, I think, is partly why the poetry of that period in particular tends to seem much more fanciful than imaginative.

Thus Prospero (the contrast was made by Leslie Stephen) threatens Ariel that he will

rend an oak
And peg thee in his knotty entrails, until
Thou hast howled away twelve winters.

And every hearer at the Globe felt as if he were himself being squeezed in that oaken vice. But the reader is merely delighted by the dainty ingenuity with which the Sylphs of Pope

Be stuff'd in vials, or transfix'd with pins,
Or plung'd in lakes of bitter washes lie,
Or wedg'd whole ages in a bodkin's eye.

Here the poet is not going to the bottom of the situation, he is gaily figure-skating on its polished, frozen surface. He is self-possessed; not possessed. Not that Imagination, either, was lacking to the writer who could describe, for example, with the sting of Tacitus, ladies of fashion in their fading years—

Still round and round the ghosts of Beauty glide
And haunt the places where their honour died.

¹ Cf. J. Renard, *Journal*, 291 (the actress Moreno's account of her state of mind): "Non, dit-elle! Un acteur n'est jamais dans la peau de son héros, mais il n'est plus dans la sienne. Quand je joue Monime, je ne pense pas à Monime, mais je ne suis plus Moreno. Je suis métamorphosée en je ne sais quoi de vibrant, de surexcité, d'embêté. Je suis un être qui a le trac, qui est en coton, et qui sue".

In a word, Coleridge seems to me to cut himself with William of Occam's razor—*entia non sunt multiplicanda*—in calling on two different faculties to explain this difference that we all feel. Donne or Marvell provides an excellent example of how one and the same gift of words and imagery can be used to produce results now magnificent, now maundering. But I doubt if a distinction often so debatable and terms so hazy can in any case be of much practical use. Coleridge's whole theory seems to me an example of that barren type of classification so dear to those who believe that if they can invent a few transcendental pigeon-holes, the Holy Spirit of poetry will descend to nest in them.¹

The same Germanic fondness for general principles marks also Coleridge's famous dispute with Wordsworth on Poetic Diction. Gray, it will be recalled, had said, surely with extreme rashness, "the language of the age is never the language of poetry". Piqued by the cold reception of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth sat down in 1800 to write a Preface. He began with a reasonable defence of simplicity against the tinsel of poetic conven-

¹ For example, Ruskin, being a brave and honest critic, whether one agrees with him or not, is not afraid to be absolutely explicit when he handles the question (*Modern Painters* (1888), vol. II, pt. III, sect. II).

"Bring the rathe primrose, that forsaken dies,	<i>Imagination.</i>
The tufted crow-toe and pale jessamine,	<i>Nugatory.</i>
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,	<i>Fancy.</i>
The glowing violet,	<i>Fancy.</i>
The musk rose and the well-attired woodbine,	<i>Vulgar.</i>
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,	<i>Imagination.</i>
And every flower that sad embroidery wears.	<i>Mixed."</i>

This is at least clear. But is it very convincing (except for that "*Mixed*")? And is it very helpful?

tion; but his pen grew more and more violent as it progressed. "There neither is, nor can be," (how *could* he thus sit down to legislate for the future also?) "any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." "In works of imagination and sentiment...in proportion as ideas and feelings are valuable, whether the composition be in prose or verse, they require and exact one and the same language." The poet "to excite rational sympathy must express himself as other men express themselves".¹ "There are few persons of good sense who would not allow that the dramatic parts of composition are defective in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature² and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own." And yet, one murmurs,

To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot....

The multitudinous Seas incarnadine....

Looke where he comes: Not Poppy, nor Mandragora,
Nor all the drowsie Syrrups of the world....

Let such bethink them, if the sleepy drench
Of that forgetful Lake benumme not still....

Each time the wonder grows what "sleepy drench" could make Wordsworth come to this. Finally, he concludes, where he should have begun, with an Appendix, far from accurate, on the practice of poets in the past. Indeed, his actual evidence throughout is limited to

¹ This surely disposes of any notion that by "language" Wordsworth meant merely "vocabulary"—which would indeed be a very strange use of language.

² In the later version of his Preface Wordsworth makes more prominent the idea that the poet's style should be "a *selection*" of common speech. This is much more reasonable, clearly, though still too narrow.

a mediocre sonnet by Gray, from which he draws conclusions that do not follow; a stanza of the *Babes in the Wood*; and two pieces by Johnson and by Cowper, who is found guilty of "vicious" writing because he says the valleys of Selkirk's island

Ne'er sighed at the sound of a knell
Or smiled when a Sabbath appeared.

Seventeen years later, in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge replied.¹ He begins with a long disquisition maintaining that poetry, even of the highest kind, need not be in metre;² argues that Wordsworth's most interesting characters are not "rustics",³ with a digression on the administration of the Poor Law in Liverpool as contrasted with agricultural districts; shows that the language of rustics is largely derived from the educated classes (to which Wordsworth could easily have retorted that he was not concerned with what it was derived from, but what it *was*); and at length makes a real point, that Wordsworth's own style is not that of rustics, particularly in the *order* of its words. Then we are told that the metre of poetry is created by the effort to curb excitement (which seems doubtful) and yet creates excitement;⁴ therefore

¹ *Biog. Lit.* xvii-xxii.

² Which does not prevent him from stating a few chapters later (xviii) that "poetry is imperfect and defective without metre".

³ Wordsworth is not as clear as he might be; but he appears to mean (1) that poets should in general use the speech of "men in real life"; and (2) that of all men in real life rustics are the sincerest in feeling, the plainest and most emphatic in speech. Still it seems a little captious of Coleridge to deny the name of "rustic" to an old shepherd like Wordsworth's Michael.

⁴ Metre, like the beating of a tom-tom, seems actually to be a means of exciting yet hypnotizing the hearer, so that he is both spell-bound like the Mariner's Wedding-guest and at the same time more suggestible to whatever he is told.

the language of poetry *must* be excited and exciting also. "I write in metre because I am about to use a language different from that of prose." "Where the language is not such... the metre *must* often become feeble." But surely this proves too much. What, we may ask, are there not passages in Chaucer and Dryden and Landor and Christina Rossetti that practise Wordsworth's theory of diction better than he did himself, keeping even the *order*¹ of prose, without the metre becoming in the least "feeble"?

Proud word you never spoke, but you will speak
 Four not exempt from pride some future day,
 Resting on one white hand a warm wet cheek
 Over my open volume you will say
 "This man loved me", then rise and trip away.²

Is this "a language different from that of prose"?
 Is the metre "feeble"?

What dost thinke on?—

Nothing; of nothing: leave thy idle questions,
 I am ith way to study a long silence.
 To prate were idle, I remember nothing.
 Thers nothing of so infinit vexation
 As mans owne thoughts.³

Is this "a language different from that of prose"?
 Is the metre "feeble"? Had Coleridge never read any French poetry? But no, the only French book he could "tolerate" was a comic poem on a parrot, Gresset's *Vert-vert*.⁴ (What an avowal for a critic!) However, a few pages later he calmly admits that there exists poetry, as in Chaucer and Herbert, "so worded that the reader

¹ Except for a moment, when speaking of *The Babes in the Wood*, Wordsworth had quite ignored the order of words, though it is hardly less important than the choice of them, in producing remoteness from common speech. ² Landor. ³ Webster. ⁴ Raysor, II, 39.

sees no one reason, either in the selection or the order of the words, why he might not have said the very same in an appropriate conversation". But what then becomes of his previous statements? He had forgotten them?

But with Coleridge as with Wordsworth it is only at the end (after some fifty pages) that he makes that appeal to actual practice which could alone settle the point. Even then he is content with answering Wordsworth on Gray's Sonnet and adding a couple of quotations each from Spenser and from Donne.

Surely any scientist of literary interests, faced with the problem, would have immediately put out his hand to the bookshelf and discovered what is pleasing in poetry by systematically examining what has in fact pleased. A few minutes with a lexicon and a grammar would have shown him that Greek contains hundreds of words, verbal forms, and constructions found in verse alone and not in prose; similarly, to a smaller extent, with Latin. He would have found that Homer's language was a mixture of dialects, never spoken anywhere; that Dante thought a similarly eclectic language right for Italian poetry. Spenser, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, Milton and Herrick, Dryden and the Augustans, would have further shown that English poets have succeeded both with poetic diction and without, though mostly with. And *then* he could have summed up his conclusions in an afternoon and a couple of pages. Indeed, it might suffice, for answering Wordsworth, to ask oneself whether "The Ancient Mariner" could be rechristened, without loss, "The Old Sailor". It is surely clear that "poetic diction" is not always bad nor yet essential; without it

poetry is still possible, but as a whole would be immensely poorer.

All this evidence was known to Coleridge; it was decisive; it should surely have come first. But both combatants have an instinctive preference for arguing from "general principles", in a way which recalls Dante's arguments that Adam *must* have spoken first and not, as the Bible reports, "that most presumptuous Eve"; that he *must* have spoken before being spoken to; that he *must* have spoken to God; that he *must* have spoken Hebrew; that he *must* have said "El". It was thus, too, that Sir Thomas Browne pondered whether badgers' legs are longer on one side or not, by considering if it were "an affront unto Reason and generally repugnant unto the course of Nature"; with arguments adduced from frogs, spiders, beetles, grasshoppers, lobsters, and locusts. It would surely be rather simpler to examine a number of badgers—or of poets. Yet such is the general level, in English criticism, of reasoning from evidence, that this controversy between Wordsworth and Coleridge is celebrated to this day by leading critics as "the most magnificent piece of critical writing in the English language" or "one of the very *apices* of English criticism"; while Saintsbury (who has, on the other hand, little use for distinctions between Fancy and Imagination) calls Coleridge's share in it "his capital critical achievement" and "one of the patterns of a critical study".

The best poetry of Coleridge remains beyond reproach, and almost beyond praise; though he was also uncritical enough to print some of the poorest doggerel in the language. Even if one were cold to *The Ancient Mariner*,

it would be foolish to attack poetry that has proved for a century its "strange power of speech". But in criticism, in so far as it is a matter of reasoning, there can be no such sacred immunity. The whole subject is far too beset with cant. And it seems to me a poor service to the young, especially, to hold up these pages of rambling as a masterpiece of hard thought. Every year the fruits of such mental vagueness show themselves in the contrast between most of the literary and scientific dissertations that I see. Only too often the literary theorists have no idea of what justifies a generalization; looking for evidence, or thinking, would break their flow of language; and yet frequently, in their desire to say everything with flowers, they do not even write so well as the scientists. Where a biologist spends days and nights counting the whiskers of hundreds of caterpillars before making a single induction, your literary critic will glance at three instances and leap. On this very matter of poetic diction Aristotle^x in his dry way had said more to the point in a few sentences twenty-one centuries before, when he observed that in poetry language too near daily life was liable to be clear but mean, while language too remote tended to be imposing but obscure; it therefore seemed wisest to aim at a happy mean. To which common-sense judgement he adds various qualifications for various kinds of poetry, no less sensible. And in the century before Coleridge, Johnson, at whom the Romantics were never tired of sneering, had put the essential point with his manly brevity: "Words being

^x *Poetics*, xxii. Cf. also Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 45 ff.; Longinus, *passim*; Ben Jonson, *Timber*; Hobbes, *Answer to Davenant*; Addison, *Spectator*, No. 285. (The three last are quoted in the section on "Style and Diction" in R. P. Cowl's useful *Theory of Poetry in England*.)

arbitrary, must owe their power to association, and have the influence, and that only, which custom has given them"—"words too familiar, or too remote, defeat the purpose of a poet". But Johnson does not offer the gin of transcendental jargon; he does not intoxicate; it is all said and understood in a moment—as clear as water—and what good is that?

To pass from Johnson to Coleridge is, indeed, to see in little, I think, what critics gained and lost with the coming of Romanticism. They became far more sensitive, more enthusiastic, less hide-bound by rules—in practical criticism the advance is plain; but they tended also to become gushing, bardolatrous, muddle-headed, and mysterious, with a fondness for windy and cloudy theories that we are still plagued with to this day. Neo-classic criticism doubtless had too much "reality-principle"; but their Romantic successors stagger terribly at times from lack of it. To put down Coleridge and open Johnson is like emerging from some stuffy *salon*, full of smoke and the pseudo-intellectual conversation of talkers shouting at one another and listening only to themselves, into the keen night air of London. The sentences of the *Lives of the Poets* ring out clear and strong as its flagstones underfoot. One breathes again. Johnson is often dull-eared; often wrong-headed; but he seldom utters nonsense, and cant never. However, I believe in Bentley's "no man was ever written down except by himself", of which Bentley was himself to provide so terrible an example in his *Milton*: and I do not wish to seem to generalize, in my turn, without evidence. The following instances of Coleridge's judgement speak mostly for themselves.

"No man was ever yet a great poet without being a profound philosopher."¹ (How far can Sappho, Pindar, Catullus, Virgil, Chaucer, or even Milton, be called "*profound* philosophers"? And Shakespeare? Without going to the extreme of Mr Bernard Shaw and denying him "any ideas worth twopence", can we resist a suspicion of Romantic gush when he is called "the morning star, the guide and the pioneer, of true philosophy"?² What *was* Shakespeare's philosophy?)

"The clear and reciprocal connexion of just taste with pure morality."³ (Without joining the extremists who deny all connection between art and life, one may hesitate to deny "taste" to a great many characters who would not have reached the distinctly prudish moral standards of Coleridge; who was shocked by the Widow Wadman and thought that Hazlitt, "poor wretch!", was "a melancholy instance of the awful Truth—that man cannot be on a level with the Beasts—he must be above them or below them".⁴ Had Aristophanes, Catullus, Villon, Ronsard, Racine, Molière, Dryden, Diderot, Chateaubriand, Musset, Baudelaire, Sainte-Beuve, Rossetti no "just taste"? It was in the irony of things that Coleridge himself was destined to be condemned by Arnold as having "no morals"; surely a judgement in its turn far too hard on one who could at least inspire devoted friendship to the last.)

"In the strict sense of the word, an undevout poet is an impossibility."⁵ Lucretius, we learn, is a mere verse-

¹ *Biog. Lit.* xv.

² *Lit. Rem.* II, 83.

³ *Lit. Rem.* II, 62.

⁴ *Unpub. Lett.* II, 190.

⁵ *Raysor*, II, 148.

maker; but the true poet is like "a child". It would be an insult to the reader's intelligence to enumerate the poets, from Euripides to Housman, who if not openly "of the Devil's party" were certainly not of God's. "La terre", writes Alfred de Vigny, "est révoltée des injustices et de la création. . . . Tous ceux qui luttèrent contre le ciel injuste ont eu l'admiration et l'amour secret des hommes." Vigny was himself one of them; he exaggerated; but he exaggerated a truth. If Coleridge believed what he said about the impossibility of an undevout poet, how could he bring himself to write like this to Byron (March 30th, 1815)?—"A sort of pre-established good will, not unlike that with which the Swan instinctively takes up the weakly cygnet into the Hollow between its wings, I knew I might confidently look for from one who is indeed a Poet; were I but assured that your Lordship had ever thought of me as a fellow-laborer in the same vineyard, and as not otherwise unworthy your notice. And surely a fellow-laborer I *have* been, and a co-inheritor of the same Bequest, tho' of a smaller portion." Imagine Johnson comparing himself to a "weakly cygnet"! But with Coleridge it was too true; and his swan-song was already sung.

"I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; that is, prose—words in their best order;—poetry, the *best* words in the best order."¹ ("Best" for what? For prose, or poetry, presumably. Could good prose be "not the best words

¹ *Table Talk*, July 12th, 1827. Elsewhere (*T.T.*, July 3rd, 1833) "the definition of good prose is—proper words in their proper places;—of good verse—the most proper words in their proper places".

in not the best order"? What do we learn by this sort of circular statement?¹)

"In dramatic composition the observation of the unities of time and place so narrows the period of action, so impoverishes the sources of pleasure, that of all the Athenian dramas there is scarcely one in which the absurdity is not glaring, of aiming at an object and utterly failing in the attainment of it."¹

(It is interesting to watch the Romantic becoming just as narrowly intolerant towards Classic rules as the neo-Classics towards Romantic licence. But, for some reason, Coleridge could not find "anything sublime" in Greek. Similarly, he talks lightheartedly of Greek actors' voices being "unnaturally and unmusically stretched" owing to the size of their theatres;² "hence the introduction of recitative, for the purpose of rendering pleasantly artificial the *distortion of the face*, and straining of the voice, occasioned by the magnitude of the building."³ He had forgotten they wore masks!)

"The Greeks, except, perhaps, in Homer, seem to have had no way of making their women interesting, but by unsexing them, as in the instances of the tragic Medea, Electra, etc."⁴ (He contrasts Spenser's Una. But if Spenser's Una is to be called "interesting", it seems a little hard to rule out Greek figures so living, although feminine, as Cassandra, Dejanira, Alcestis,

¹ Raysor, II, 161.

² Actually in a Greek theatre like that of Epidaurus the acoustics are so admirable that an ordinary speaking voice is audible everywhere. But Coleridge could be forgiven for not knowing that.

³ Raysor, II, 73.

⁴ *Lit. Rem.* I, 95.

Phaedra, Iphigenia, the witch-girl of Theocritus, or the young Medea of Apollonius, who helped to inspire Virgil's Dido.)

This coldness towards things Greek provides a strange contrast to the religious and Romantic fervour excited in Coleridge by anything Shakespearian; until again one sighs for the level-headedness of Johnson. "Shakespeare", we are told, "never introduces a word, or thought, in vain or out of place:¹ if we do not understand him, it is our fault or the fault of copyists and typographers." Not only is Shakespeare "the morning-star of true philosophy"; even his indecencies are somehow immaculate. "I appeal to the whole of Shakespeare's writings, whether his grossness is not the mere sport of fancy dissipating low feelings by exciting the intellect."² It is, of course, possible that some Elizabethans were wrong in not sharing Coleridge's view of *Venus and Adonis* as being totally unsensual, "like the twinkling dances of two vernal butterflies". But anyone who has studied Elizabethan drama comes to know how many *double-entendres* obscured by time are still skated over by delicate commentators; hardly one of whom dares to explain, for example, the last lines of the *Merchant of Venice*. There

¹ One's confidence in Coleridge's judgement on such a point is a little shaken by finding, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, how he proposes to emend

Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids....

As "mermaid" recurs two lines later, "I strongly suspect that Shakespeare wrote either 'sea-queens' or rather 'sea-brides'". Alternatively he suggests "submarine graces". (Raysor, I, 88.) It is on a par with his "evident" emendation of Doll Tear-sheet to "Tear-street" (*terere stratum*—"to walk the streets"!).

² Raysor, II, 127.

is no need to labour the point; but to gloss it over is cant. And since cant brings its own reward, we find Coleridge consequently driven to give notice of dismissal to that low Porter of Macbeth's. He must be a creature dragged in by the actors; apart from a single sentence, "not one syllable has the ever-present being of Shakespeare". Then, when that masterpiece of sardonic humour has thus been censored, we read that there is an "entire absence of comedy, nay, even of irony and philosophic contemplation, in *Macbeth*—because wholly tragic".¹

Similarly with his view of Shakespeare's women. "'Most women have no character at all,' said Pope, and meant it for satire. Shakespeare, who knew man and woman much better, saw that it, in fact, was the perfection of woman to be characterless. Every one wishes a Desdemona or Ophelia for a wife—creatures who, though they may not always understand you, do always feel you, and feel with you."² When one is told that Coleridge "was naturally a psychologist", this passage among others recurs to memory. It may be replied that such cases are too practical. The excuse does not seem to me very good. If we are told that a man is a marvellous architect, but observe that his buildings repeatedly blow down, or have their staircases forgotten, we shrug our shoulders and go elsewhere. Psychologists, like architects, have plenty of scope for showing their "natural" gifts; the question is, how will their theories *work*?

Thus to like women "characterless" is a matter of taste; to say Shakespeare liked them so is rather bold;

¹ Raysor, I, 75, 78. And no "irony"?—with all the tragic irony of the Witches or of III, I, 36ff. And why no irony *because* tragic?

² *Table Talk*, September 27th, 1830.

but to say that he actually drew them so and meant Ophelia to seem "perfect" or that "everyone" would like to marry her...! Even poor Desdemona, by a certain too delicate and fragile disingenuousness, does something to help on a tragedy that could hardly have occurred with Juliet or Rosalind or Portia; and as for Ophelia, it is strange indeed that Coleridge, who thought he had "a smack of Hamlet" himself, should have failed to see the essential part that poor charming doll surely plays in the final ruin at Elsinore. With his mother and uncle, Hamlet has lost faith in the loyalty of wife to husband, of brother to brother, of mother to son. He turns despairingly to the loyalty of friends—but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are spies. To the loyalty of a mistress—but Ophelia (how different if it had been Juliet, or even Desdemona!) is ready to drop him at a parent's word; ready in her dreadful, docile innocence to spy likewise upon him. She too is part of this universal web of falsity; like her father, preaching "To thine own self be true" to the very son he is about to spy on in Paris; like her brother, preaching "honour" to her over whose very grave he is to rant, before he goes to do murder with his poisoned rapier. Ophelia too belongs to this world of lies, where for sixpence players howl as if their hearts would break for Hecuba; where young Osric is as ready as old Polonius to fawn assent, while the plot is being spun and the poison mixed. Ophelia is another Gertrude, lovely, innocent as yet, but spineless; that resemblance may even be the reason why it is from Gertrude that we hear the story of Ophelia's death. If Hamlet in his frenzy at the treachery all round him treats her as a prostitute, surely we are meant to feel that a girl less "characterless"

would as little have provoked such treatment as endured it.

But Coleridge thought her perfect; just as he would needs have Falstaff valiant, not a coward (he "pretended to be one"); just as he is edified by Prince Hal's casting off of his old friend—here, "as in other instances, Shakespeare has showed us the defeat of mere intellect by a noble feeling, the Prince being the superior moral character who rises above his insidious companion".¹ Is this what most readers feel? Or, again, does one who is "naturally a psychologist" write to his own wife, one wonders, by way of soothing her jealousy of Dorothy Wordsworth and his friends?—"Permit me, my dear Sara, without offence to you, as Heaven knows! it is without any feeling of pride in myself, to say, that in six acquirements, and in quantity and quality of natural endowments whether of feeling, or of intellect, you are the inferior."² No wonder Coleridge thought Milton's docile Eve the only woman character comparable with Shakespeare's.

Next we are told that Shakespeare drew no misers because misers have become extinct, and he foresaw they would. "As a passion, avarice has disappeared. How admirably then did Shakespeare foresee that if he drew such a character, it could not be permanent!"³ Apart from the question whether Shylock was not avaricious, is it in fact true that "avarice has disappeared"? And how could Shakespeare have foreseen it, anyway? And why, if so, did he choose to represent witches, who were surely nearer to extinction than misers?

¹ Raysor, II, 210.

² *Unpub. Lett.* I, 221.

³ Raysor, II, 145.

Then we are asked to admire Shakespeare's artistic economy—"Schiller has the material sublime; to produce an effect he sets you a whole town on fire. . . . But Shakespeare drops a handkerchief."¹ This sounds so neat that most people assume instantly that it must be true. "A striking contrast," observes Saintsbury. But if one really considers all the battles and sieges and shipwrecks and hurricanes on blasted heaths, all the heaped-up corpses at the end of *Lear* and *Othello* and *Hamlet*, is it, in fact, the case? Why remember only Desdemona's handkerchief falling on the floor, and forget that "vile jelly", old Gloucester's eye? Is it not saner to admit that Shakespeare, like Nature, is magnificently extravagant; instead of praising him as if he were the author of *Bérénice*? Surely Shakespeare is more like the God of Peer Gynt—"God, I see, is still a father to me; but economical He is not."

For Coleridge, however, in the teeth of some fairly good evidence, Shakespeare must even have been a great actor. "It is my persuasion", he said to J. P. Collier, "—indeed my firm conviction—so firm that nothing can shake it—the rising of Shakespeare's spirit from the grave, modestly confessing his own deficiencies, could not alter my opinion—that Shakespeare, in the best sense of the word, was a very great actor. Great dramatists make great actors. . . . It is worth having died two hundred years ago to have heard Shakespeare deliver a single line."²

Great dramatists make great actors? Who, for example? What can one do with such methods of reasoning? Yet Saintsbury can say: "Coleridge never admires

¹ *T.T.*, December 29th, 1822.

² Raysor, II, 30 n.

Shakespeare too much." Such is Romantic criticism. You cannot trust it.

The same recklessness shows itself in details. Bolingbroke says:

Go to the rude ribs of that ancient castle,
Through brazen trumpet send the breath of parle
Into his ruin'd ears. . . .

"Shakespeare", observes Coleridge, "purposely used the personal pronoun 'his', to show that although Bolingbroke was only speaking of the castle, his thoughts dwelt on the King."¹ "Ruin'd ears" may certainly apply as much to Richard as the castle; but everyone knows that in Shakespeare's day "its" was only just creeping into use; "his" is not necessarily a "personal pronoun" at all, being the regular possessive also of the *impersonal* pronoun "it". Elsewhere a similar false subtlety suggests to Coleridge that "Swift adopted the name Stella, which is a man's name, with a feminine termination, to denote the mysterious epicene relation in which poor Miss Johnston stood to him".² Stella is indeed a man's name in Latin; but how curious to forget the Stella of Sidney's Sonnets! Such slips do not matter in a poet; in a critic they may well give us pause. Yet it is far less these details that wake distrust than his habit of facile generalization on all subjects. Thus this "natural psychologist" tells us that "Humour is consistent with pathos, while wit is not".³ Is there then no pathos in the dying wit of Mercutio; in Heine's "Dieu me pardonnera, c'est son métier"; in Oscar Wilde's "Robbie, I'm dying beyond my means"? Again, we

¹ Raysor, II, 190.

² T.T., July 26th, 1830.

³ *Addit. T.T.* (Ashe), p. 326.

are impressively informed: "A true poem must give 'as much pleasure in each part as is compatible with the greatest sum of pleasure in the whole.'... In reading Milton, for instance, scarcely a line can be pointed out which, critically examined, could be called in itself good."¹ Open Milton anywhere: is it true? What shall we call "in itself good", if not lines like these?—

Fall'n Cherube, to be weak is miserable....

To bellow through the vast and boundless Deep....

Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strew the Brooks
In Vallombrosa....

They heard, and were abasht, and up they sprung....

The haunt of Seales and Orcs and sea-mews' clang....

Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves.

For a number of readers Milton lives by such isolated splendours rather than by his total effects; others will disagree; but who else will be found to praise his total effects and yet deny him great lines? Similarly, it is legitimate, though odd, for a critic to be blind to Wordsworth's daffodils. But it is difficult to respect a man who accuses the poem of "mental bombast" on the Pecksniffian ground that such words of ecstasy should be reserved to "describe the joy of retrospection, when the images and virtuous actions of a whole well-spent life pass before that conscience which is indeed the *inward* eye: which is indeed '*the bliss of solitude*'".² It is a curious picture of a happy afternoon's diversion. And when one reflects what Coleridge had done with his own talents,

¹ Raysor, II, 68.

² *Biog. Lit.* xxii.

while it would be heartless and priggish to reproach him overmuch, do we not wonder a little that he could without wincing write these complacent words?

I know that to criticize Coleridge's criticism will seem, to many, blasphemy; I remember how a coloured gentleman to whom I expressed doubts of his oracle's infallibility, turned paler and hastened away in horror before a thunderbolt should hurtle through the roof. But it seems to me a very small service to literature or to education to go on being so uncritical of this sort of criticism. Certainly Coleridge cannot claim to have been over-charitable to others. French criticisms of Shakespeare were for him "the judgments of monkeys by some wonderful phenomenon put into the mouths of people shaped like men".¹ (Indeed, the whole French nation was, he said, "like grains of gunpowder—each by itself smutty and contemptible".²) Hume, on the same subject of Shakespeare, resembled "an apothecary's phial placed under the falls of Niagara".³ Voltaire was "a wretched sciolist"⁴ and a "paltry scribbler". Of Buffon Coleridge "could not think without horror". Gay's *Beggar's Opera* filled him "with horror and disgust".⁵ Johnson was "the Frog-Critic. How nimbly it leaps, how excellently it swims—only the fore-legs (it must be admitted) are too long, and the hind ones too short."⁶ "Gibbon's style is detestable, but his style is not the worst thing about him."⁷ Landor had never learned "how to write simple and lucid English".⁸ Goethe was inferior to Schiller; and much of *Faust* "vulgar, licentious

¹ Raysor, II, 169.

³ *T.T.*, July 30th, 1831.

⁵ *Omniana* (1888), p. 387.

⁷ *T.T.*, August 15th, 1833.

² Raysor, II, 210.

⁴ *Lit. Rem.*, II, 69.

⁶ Raysor, I, 82.

⁸ *T.T.*, January 1st, 1834.

and blasphemous".¹ Scott's *Ivanhoe* and "*The Bride of Ravensmuir*, or whatever its name may be" were "two wretched abortions".² And Tennyson did not "very well understand what metre was".³ All critics, even the greatest, have made their slips; but why are we never allowed to forget Johnson's deafness to *Lycidas*, while these observations of Coleridge's are delicately ignored? Is it because the admirable later prose of Johnson can still be revisited with pleasure, while his successor is largely talked about by people who would rather praise than read him?

Romanticism enabled Coleridge to write a poem more poetic than anything for a hundred years before it; it opened worlds to him that Johnson had never dreamed of; but it also enabled him, in this new age with its weakened sense of fact and of dignity, to write other things also, that Johnson would never have dreamed of, and some that Johnson would have scorned. "So then," writes Saintsbury, "there abide these three, Aristotle, Longinus, and Coleridge."

It is forbidden to doubt this. The ordinary man is too highbrow-beaten. And Coleridge suits admirably those persons with religious instincts who want not critics but mystagogues; who care not for the truth of what they are told, but for its tune. They like what sounds profound, even if it is largely lobbing pebbles down an empty well. They would far rather read Coleridge than Sainte-Beuve. But I suspect Coleridge of being a better hypnotist than critic. "It is indeed a strange thing,"

¹ *T.T.*, February 16th, 1833.

² *Addit. T.T.*, January, 1821.

³ *T.T.*, April 24th, 1833.

mused the Lady Murasaki in Japan a thousand years ago, "that a perfectly ordinary remark, if made in a quiet colourless voice, may seem original and interesting; for instance, in conversations about poetry, some quite commonplace piece of criticism will be accepted as profound, merely because it is made in a particular tone of voice".

The genius of Coleridge, it seems to me, remains wonderful enough for what it was, without rhapsodies over what it was not.

CHAPTER V

CRITICISM IN AN UNROMANTIC AGE

THREE years ago I was at Thermopylae. The mists clung low, I remember, on the slopes of Othrys and Oeta. Under the cold grey of the sky a chime of unseen goat-bells rose and sank, like a ghostly music, over pastures pale with asphodel; and a blue smoke of burning crawled heavily across the swamps of the Spercheios—the same Spercheios still to whom the old Peleus vowed the locks of Achilles, the day he should come safe home from Troy. Eastward lay the misty strait of Artemision, up which the Persian came; and, hidden behind Euboea, that rocky Scyros where rested, once, the dust of Theseus and now of Rupert Brooke. In Greece the dead past walks so living in the light of noon, that the present itself seems often more ghostly by its side. And there at the Gate of Thermopylae the thought of those quiet lines of Simonides on the most famous of all forlorn hopes for freedom—

Tell them at Lacedaemon, passer-by,
That here obedient to their laws we lie—

calls up, as something very faint and far away, the thought of modern Europe, fast growing too Spartan to be free; beside the memory of Homer's Achilles in his eternal youth there rises like a pale and fretful ghost the memory of that modern poetry which proclaims itself a whimper of hollow men, and of the modern critics who applaud it as the true utterance of a disillusioned age.

What is it that has happened to our poetry, and our judges of poetry, in the twenty years since Rupert Brooke, silent now in Scyros, was writing verse which, whatever its lasting worth, at least quivered with vitality; and prose, above all in his letters, that danced with such grace and gaiety on the threshold of the world? It is easy to reply—"The War". More has happened than that—so much, that qualities like his are hardly even considered now in the philosophy of critics. So impossible does it seem for any two successive generations to agree what they mean by the simple statement—"This poem is good." What indeed does it mean?

To the Greek in his best days good poetry meant, above all, poetry that bred good men. The Muses were the daughters of Omniscience. The God of Poetry was the God also of Prophecy and of Healing, the divine voice that spoke at the Delphic centre of the earth. How to plough, how to fight, how to live, how to die—the poets taught all these. The boy who got by heart the great speech of Sarpedon, the girl who heard recited the farewell of Hector to Andromache, might learn, so the Greek believed, how themselves to face hereafter the breaking-points of life. And, even when the day of Greece draws to its twilight, reading Plutarch we might feel that this belief had not been belied by the lives their greatest led; reading "Longinus" we shall find the same faith unrepentantly repeated in that treatise *On Great Writing* which rings like a funeral oration over the literature of his race—"Great writing is the echo of a great soul." Now, of course, so naïve a view is quite exploded; no one supposes that art can have to do with ethics, or poetry be anything so absurd as a sort of morals set to music.

The men of the Middle Ages, however, still believed something of the kind, though they spun few theories about it. For, even more than antiquity, the Middle Ages did almost wholly without critics; and, by some miracle, did quite well without. But in Dante's eyes, for example, the three great subjects for poetry must still be the three fundamental things—Salus, Venus, Virtus—War by which life is defended, Love by which it is perpetuated, Conduct by which it is controlled. The Morality Plays, again, only too conscientiously earn their name. For "moral Gower", as for Horace, a poem is "good" that mixes profit with pleasure—

wisdom to the wise

And pley to hem that lust to pleye.

And for Malory, as for his publisher Caxton, the tale of Arthur has a purpose to serve, a high and reproachful example to set before a chivalry grown decadent.

But there is one important change. In Greece, when a clash occurs, it is the moralist who rebels against the poet—Xenophanes against Homer, Solon against Thespis, Plato against all poetry; in the Middle Ages, when Christianity dominates Europe and the Church has built in the Catholic West something not wholly unlike the city of Plato's dream, it is the poet, now half an outlaw, who turns at times to kick against the pricks of a tyrannical morality. When the Wandering Scholars steal for the tavern the rhythms of the choir, when Aucassin gaily prefers Hell with its harpers and minstrels to the bleak Heaven of priest and anchorite, when from brothel or gibbet rings out the wild voice of Villon, a new race stands on the frontiers of literature—the Bohemians.

With the Renaissance arrive also, in full force, the Critics. Their endeavour is double—to save literature from the ethical attacks of Plato and the Puritans; and to subject it instead to the aesthetic rules of Aristotle and the Pedants. To be “good”, Poetry must now observe the Laws of God on the one hand and of the Ancients on the other; but especially of the Ancients.

Then against these Ancients, as the Renaissance in its turn grows old, the Moderns grow rebellious. The classical scholar begins to carry less weight than the man of the world, a Bentley than a Dryden or an Addison. By an easy compromise it becomes the orthodox creed to believe in a new Trinity of three things which yet are one—the wisdom of the Ancients, Nature, and Good Sense—the three benign powers that had fashioned this ordered world of neo-Classicism out of the benighted chaos of Monk and Goth. Never had it been so easy to know what was good poetry, and what was not; never was it to be so easy again. Critics were judges administering the law of an enlightened land. They still disagreed, being human; but about the applications, not the principles, of the law. Racine voices his delight at finding by actual experience that Good Sense was indeed the same in ancient Athens as in modern Paris. Nearly a century later Thomas Warton can still speak, without irony, of living “in the days of writing by rule”, when “critical taste is universally diffused”. We amid our critical anarchy may mingle with our amusement a touch, perhaps, of regret.

Unfortunately, if it had become easy to say what was good poetry, it had become strangely rare to write it. Upon this world so comfortably reposing on its false

premisses came the retribution of revolution. Excess became wisdom; exuberance, beauty. After that Romantic riot had passed, the nineteenth century restored a certain reign of order in literature; but never the reign of law that the eighteenth had known. Matthew Arnold, for example, was respected, not obeyed. He might condemn modern writers as "fantastic" and "lacking in sanity"; he might demand that poetry should be "criticism of life". In answer came the shout of "Art for Art's sake", and a new invasion of Bohemians or of aesthetes seeking not so much the defiant Hell of Aucassin as an Epicurean Olympus of their own. To-day that war-cry too has died away; and we hear only, like Virgil's doomed warrior out in No Man's Land:

Confusae sonus urbis et inlaetabile murmur—

The voice of a city's trouble, and a murmur void of joy.

For Antiquity, in a word, "good" poetry meant noble poetry. For the Renaissance it meant learned poetry; the poetry of scholars, and of wits. For the eighteenth century it became the poetry of men—and women—of the world. For the Romantics, the poetry of generous rebels. They still had rules, if only to break them. But now—! Twenty-three centuries after the Father of Criticism, Aristotle, is there a single law of literature, a single principle for writing poetry, a single canon for criticizing it, about which a congress of our critics would agree? For it is no longer agreed that poetry should be beautiful, or noble, or civilized, or well constructed, or musical, or intelligent, or even intelligible. If criticism be a science, only contrast its progress with that of any other. We know nothing. Unhappily, unlike Socrates,

we do not seem to know even that. It would indeed be much to expect. The multiplication of sects is not apt to multiply tolerance. It is only natural that criticism, growing more chaotic, should grow more dogmatic too. To-day we hear with admiration that *Hamlet* is "most certainly"—"most certainly an artistic failure"; or again, in painting, that El Greco can be *proved* a greater painter than Velasquez. It might seem sometimes as if critics were doomed to remain the Bourbons of the world of Art—forgetting nothing, learning nothing. And while they persist in talking as if the values they now discover in poetry were the obvious and only ones, the values themselves grow odder and odder. Thus a panegyric by a modern critic on Mr Ezra Pound, after celebrating the poet's subtlety in the use of inverted commas, proceeds: "His poise, though so varied, and for all his audacities, is sure; how sure, nothing can show better than the pun in the last stanza of the third poem:

O bright Apollo,
 τίς ἄνδρα, τίς ἥρωα, τίνα θεόν,¹
 What god, man, or hero
 Shall I place a tin wreath upon!"

¹ The above is printed as in the original, with the usual dose of solecisms—not the least characteristic side of Mr Pound's passion for Greek. The curious reader should turn to the *Selected Poems* of Mr Ezra Pound, edited by Mr T. S. Eliot. Here he will find two master-minds of our age in conjunction; and, finding also one classical howler after another, may admire the intuition which enables Mr Pound, in a manual of universal culture entitled *How to Read*, to dismiss Thucydides as "a journalist", and to "chuck out" Pindar "without the slightest compunction".

(Since the above was written, I have received from Mr Pound, who is a total stranger to me, a letter, ungrammatical in its English and unprintable in its vocabulary, informing me that I was "born in infamy" and breathing threats of violence, because I had written to the press on behalf of the unfortunate Abyssinians. *Tout se tient.*)

"In what poet, after the seventeenth century," continues the critic, "can we find anything like this contributing to a completely serious effect (the poem is not only tragically serious but solemn)!" "τὴν ἀνδρᾶ"—"tin wreath"—the sort of joke made by preparatory school-boys beginning Greek—"sureness of poise"—"not only tragically serious but solemn"! Solemn?—Yes. A belfry full of owls could not equal it. But, as wit, surely Slender himself would have found it a little thin?

Little wonder, in this welter of opinions, if a critic as honest as Dr I. A. Richards has given up his earlier attempt to devise a criterion of values; abjured in his *Practical Criticism* all principles for judging poetry, "however refined and subtle"; and declared that it is the reader's business to value works for himself, while the critic's sole concern is with interpretation.

That interpretation remains by far his most important function may well be; but is it all? Instead of saying "I think this poem is good" should he really say, like that precise gentleman, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, "Cela est bon, pour moi, quant à présent"?

For a long time, indeed, I thought so—that calling a poem "good" did in fact mean simply "I value it"; or "many educated people have valued it for many years past"; or, if it was a new work, "I think many educated people will value it for many years to come." A critical judgement was, in other words, either autobiography, or history, or a guess about the future. Thus when Matthew Arnold called Shelley "an ineffectual angel", it was a defiance of history and a bad prophecy—Shelley has had far too much effect to be called that; but it remained a very interesting piece of critical autobio-

graphy, by no means deserving the angry abuse that has been hurled at it. For to a whole class of men from Lamb onwards—men quite as sensitive to poetry as others—Shelley *has* seemed, in Mr Max Beerbohm's phrase, "a crystal crank". Any sort of absolute Beauty, in other words, like absolute Good, I have always failed to believe in. The impression a poem gives seems to me like a child begotten by the poet's thought on the reader's, in "a marriage of true minds". Two readers can no more have identical impressions than two mothers could have identical children. Indeed, to adapt Heraclitus, even the same person cannot read the same poem twice—he will have changed in the interval. A hundred biologists will see essentially the same caterpillar, because men have essentially the same eyes, and the same way of reasoning to check their data. But we do not look at poetry through microscopes. It builds itself a body next our hearts, out of memories and emotions that are ours alone. That is why it is so hard to make the Art of Criticism in any sense a science.

And yet are there no standards? Is there no relation to be found between these apparent caprices within us and the laws that seem to govern the world outside?—no series of intricate cog-wheels by which our instinctive preferences may fit ultimately into the mesh of the great wheel of things? For if the differences between human beings are extraordinary, so also are the fundamental likenesses, the experiences that we can and do somehow share; so that after three thousand years Homer and Sappho still fascinate remote barbarians like ourselves, who do not even know how to pronounce the music of their verse. When values have stood so firm, can we find

no foundations beneath them? And when, on the other hand, we are summoned to go down on our knees before hollow men or tin wreaths, can we only agree to differ? Or when a critic, contrasting Baudelaire with Tennyson, singles out for special praise that worst poem of Baudelaire's which describes the swarming of flies and maggots on a woman's putrid corpse, and explains that *In Memoriam* fails because Tennyson himself failed to picture Arthur Hallam lying like that in Clevedon churchyard, can one only say to this sort of imbecile—"Well, if you like that kind of thing, I suppose it's good for you"? Because one knows it isn't.

Some criterion, in fact, some standard of judgement can, I think, be found. Often it cannot be applied. It could very often be misapplied. But even an islet, even a single plank, is something to cling to in such a chaos.

The fundamental instinct of all life, we may say, is to extend and multiply itself—to live more abundantly, to live more complexly. Roots, polyps, philosophers, all stretch their feelers out and out into the unknown, straining to turn Not-Me into Me. And as the living organism acquires more memory and more consciousness, it is as if it planted flowers along the paths it had found best to follow—the flowers of pleasure; and along the paths to destruction, the thorns of pain. Then the creature may grow too absorbed in gathering roses, or primroses, to look where it is going—even though, in an ever-changing world, the primrose path leads now to a precipice. What was a signal of safety or of danger warns no longer: the means has become itself an end. Now we

eat to please our palates; we love for loving's sake; we think for mere curiosity. The *savant* and the artist are born; eager to think and know and feel, to see and hear, for no satisfaction beyond the experience and the activity in themselves.

But to all this a Greek, I think, might have answered: "True, there are no fairer flowers than grow on the paths of the Muses. Yet Time will let no one stand still, and all paths lead somewhere. Therefore in Greece we always thought it simple sense to ask where such paths led. These flowers bear fruit; among them we have found growing the lotus and the hemlock. The art of men is like the play of animals; but the play of animals is not only play; it is a rehearsal of life, a quickening of eye and a strengthening of sinew for struggles to come. When a human play is over and the actors doff their masks, life still remains to be lived. Your cleverest critics will say that a work is 'improbable' or 'tedious' or 'badly written'; that it is 'well-constructed' or 'brilliant' or 'intoxicating'. There they stop. But our Aristophanes did not question that Euripides was brilliant; he was concerned because he thought him a brilliant will-o'-the-wisp—and the more brilliant, the worse. He did not deny he was intoxicating; he denied that intoxication was of necessity a good state of mind. He was wrong, you say? But wrong in principle? He was one-sided? Are you so sure you are not?

"Do your critics really show much breadth of vision, when they talk so much of the tricks of the trade—of the heating of the pastry-cook's oven and the mixing of the dough; and never stop to ask if his products are wholesome or poison in the end? We hear a great deal of the

fiddler's cat-gut and the skill of his fingering; not whether his music is the sort that Helots or harlots love.

"You are tolerant—or indifferent—about these things. But you, or your posterity, may find that Nature is not."

Now I confess it does not seem to me altogether easy to answer this Greek. And yet does this mean that we have run full circle round the corner into the hands of Plato, once more, and into the arms of Mrs Grundy? Are we handing over Poetry to be strait-laced by the Puritans on the one hand, prostituted for propaganda on the other by Fascist and Communist? That would be appalling. Yet Greek poetry escaped. Why?

There are, I think, certain human qualities that we have learnt spontaneously to value, because life has proved them valuable. This instinctive admiration is like the instinctive pleasure we take in other wholesome things; but more disinterested, more aesthetic. Vitality, strength, courage, devotion, pity, grace—these move us, as directly as beauty moves us. But not, surely, without cause. When a woman loves a man's strength or courage, it is only because her dead ancestors, sitting in council within her, push her blindly with their ghostly hands towards what she will need, for herself and her children, in the warfare of the world. So with the instinctive appeal such qualities possess in general—it is no mere whimsy or matter of taste. We think courage a fine and poetic thing, for the excellent, if prosaic, reason that it has been for ages untold a highly important thing to have.

In other words it is hard to say where exactly aesthetics ends and ethics begins. The Greeks felt that

truth so intuitively that they used one word, which we poorly render "fine", to express both the "good" and the "beautiful". For the same reason their poetry and their morality closely overlapped. The root of good living, for them, was to temper good sense with poetic imagination; the root of good poetry, to temper poetic imagination with good sense. The same attitude stands out in what seems to me perhaps the noblest sculpture that I know—the West Pediment at Olympia. It is a scene of wild riot and rapine, the attempt of the Centaurs at the bridal of Peirithous to carry off the women of the Lapithae. One can imagine the turpitude and crudity for which such a subject would seem a heaven-sent occasion now. But there at Olympia even the bestial Centaurs have acquired instead a touch of that nobility of suffering, which Shakespeare in his gracious wisdom gave even to Caliban. And amidst all the heat and dust of that mad grapple of writhing bodies and clutching hands, of straining feet and gnashing teeth, the heroes and their women still keep upon their faces the unearthly calm of walkers in a dream. One woman, above all, is thrusting from her with magnificent force a Centaur's encircling arms; but her countenance, bent earthwards, not on him, is so still that it might have come from some statue of Meditation or of Solitude. In the centre of all, with one arm stretched above the tumult, stands the very embodiment of the Greek spirit, Apollo, with the splendour of his immortal body, the calm, a little heavy even, of the gods that know no mortal pain. It is appalling that the Greek genius should ever have sunk from this to the grimacings of the Laocoon. But here at its highest at Olympia it recalls the saying of the French critic

Alain: "Les beaux visages sont comme des preuves de cette puissance d'oublier et de s'oublier. Je doute qu'on puisse citer un beau visage où l'on ne lise cette absence de préjugé, ce pardon à toutes choses et à soi, cette jeunesse enfin toujours jeune, qui vient de ce qu'on ne joue aucun personnage." That is too narrow a definition of beauty. But it is interesting that it might almost be a psycho-analyst's definition of mental health—a state of mind tormented by no repressions, no worms of conscience, no senses of guilt. So with Homer. Greek Art at its best seems to me, above all, and beyond all others, sane. And sanity, I think, is not a matter of taste.

But the end came—Plato, Christianity, asceticism, Puritanism. The great flaw in the Greek view of poetry had been that it was often too crudely didactic. They were over-simple. Like Ruskin after them, they failed sometimes to see that Poetry had far better imply things than preach them directly—that in the open pulpit her voice grows hoarse and fails. And now new moralities arose that considered not health, but holiness; not sanity, but sin. As morality lost its poetry, poetry tended to lose its morale; to the ultimate undoing of both. The revolt of Aucassin may indeed be stimulating at first; but I doubt if either Bohemia or Ivory Towers are healthy for poets in the end. Ivory Towers have Ivory Gates, through which false and vain dreams come. Such a life divides the poet from his hearers; it divides him against himself. Even Milton's Paradise was all the more lost because its creator was himself half of the Devil's party. Milton's indeed is a typical dilemma, like Spenser's, like Matthew Arnold's, torn between the splendour of the Hellene and the Hebrew's righteousness. It is good,

they feel, to turn the other cheek; yet it is fine "never to submit or yield".

Martha I paint, and dream of Hera's brow;
Mary, and think of Aphrodite's form.

But in spite of this recurrent clash for two thousand years between ethic and aesthetic ideals, certain qualities that we value in real life still affect, more than we often realize ourselves, the value we attach even to so technical a thing as style. Mr Yeats, who writes of poetry like a poet, not like a pedant or a priest, has spoken on this very point, of "that purification from insincerity, vanity, malignity, arrogance which is the discovery of style. . . style which is but high breeding in words and in argument". These qualities do not figure largely in the pages of critical treatises; which is perhaps partly why they never yet taught anyone to write. But in the style of the Epic Masters, for instance, from the *Iliad* to *The Dynasts*, amid all their differences, there seems to me always something nobly proud and aloof; upon their pages stands imprinted the shadowy footmark of the lion. Or take a more concrete example, a familiar pair of parallel passages, the dying speech of Arcite in Chaucer and in Dryden.¹

Naught may the woful spirit in myn herte
Declare o poynt of alle my sorwes smerte
To yow, my lady, that I love most;
But I biquethe the service of my gost

¹ This was written before the delivery by Professor Housman of his Leslie Stephen Lecture for 1933, in which there occurs a similar comparison of other passages in the *Knight's Tale*, by Chaucer and by Dryden, with a similar conclusion. There indeed the comparison is made from the point of view of style alone. But it is pleasant to find this measure of confirmation from such an authority.

To yow aboven every creature,
 Sin that my lyf may no lenger dure.
 Allas, the wo! allas, the peynes stronge,
 That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!
 Allas, the deeth! alas, myn Emelye!
 Allas, departyng of our companye!
 Allas, myn hertes quene! allas, my wyf!
 Myn hertes lady, endere of my lyf!
 What is this world? what asketh men to have?
 Now with his love, now in his colde grave
 Allone, withouten eny companye.
 Farwel, my swete fo! myn Emelye!
 And softe tak me in your armes tweye,
 For love of God, and herkneth what I seye.

Those eighteen lines Dryden improved to twenty-eight:

No language can express the smallest part
 Of what I feel, and suffer in my heart,
 For you, whom best I love and value most.

Chaucer's "woful spirit" has become, in Dryden, "language". That change is but too symbolical of the rest! Just as Dryden supposes, writing with the cleverness of the head and not the wisdom of the heart, that "love and value" means more than Chaucer's simple "love".

But to your service I bequeath my ghost;
 Which, from this mortal body when untied,
 Unseen, unheard, shall hover at your side;
 Nor fright you waking, nor your sleep offend,
 But wait officious, and your steps attend.

Dryden has dressed up into a sort of spectral footman that forlorn hope of the dying Arcite which Chaucer had wisely left in a sad brevity, vague as the hope itself.

How I have loved, excuse my faltering tongue,
 My spirit's feeble, and my pains are strong;
 This I may say, I *only* grieve to die,
 Because I lose my charming Emily.

This Chaucer's Arcite did not say; with advantage, since when said we do not believe it.

To die, when Heaven had put you in my power!
Fate could not choose a more malicious hour.

Chaucer's Arcite did not talk about Heaven putting Emily "in his power", as if she were some captured animal; nor was he small enough to imagine Fate itself so small as to gratify "malice".

What greater curse could envious Fortune give,
Than just to die when I began to live!
Vain men! how vanishing a bliss we crave;
Now warm in love, now withering in the grave!

Here Dryden seems to me to be growing for a moment more sincere; then he again remembers his audience and his fatal itch to produce effects; and the falsetto returns.

Never, O never more to see the sun!
Still dark, in a *damp* vault, and still alone!

One would think he was afraid of catching, like Webster's Flamineo, "an everlasting cold".

This fate is common; but I lose my breath
Near bliss, and yet not blessed before my death.
Farewell! but take me dying in your arms;
'Tis all I can enjoy of all your charms.

The anguish of a dying lover at leaving his mistress unpossessed is a touch true enough to life, though Chaucer passed it by; in the last letters of Keats it becomes terrible; but, tricked out with these flowers of speech, does it not become a little rancid, a little crude and vulgar? And, with ten lines more than Chaucer, how much of Chaucer's poetry Dryden has lost! If one cares for labels like Fancy and Imagination, I know no better example of the difference between them.

Dryden was surely an admirable journalist in verse; sometimes a splendid orator; occasionally a great poet. He had gained, from the poets before him and from his own fluent career, a greater familiarity than Chaucer could ever have, with the capacities of the heroic couplet and the English tongue. He was gifted with all the wit of the Metaphysical Poets, and with sense enough to abandon their abuse of it. Yet despite all these technical advantages comparison with Chaucer, as with Milton, kills him. It is like the contact of Satan with Ithuriel's spear—

for no falsehood can endure
Touch of celestial temper.

Dryden could be sincere; but often he did not choose to be. There was about his character this touch of the second-rate which reveals itself as inescapably in the lines of a poem as in the lines of a face. It is natural enough in an age when criticism of poetry cares for none of these things, thinking only of technique and of cleverness, that Dryden should be idolized and his reputation rise till *All for Love* is ranked with or above *Antony and Cleopatra*. With a similar extravagance we praise Donne; for, as Dryden salted life with clever wit, Donne spattered life with clever mud. That vein of cheapness, in spite of which these poets were justly honoured in the past, tends now to become their special merit in the eyes of critics who care not for the Donne who can be as direct as Catullus, as imaginatively lovely as Marvell, but for Donne the human corkscrew. In the same way Pope is promoted from his old place as a flashing wit, with a touch of the tragic intensity of the asp, to rank with those who seem to me companions for

a lifetime, where he is a companion for half-hours. The man who wrote—

Yes, I am proud, I must be proud to see
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me—

does indeed attain for a moment the daemonic greatness of Shakespeare's Iago; but that is rather different from being Shakespeare. And when I hear thin-lipped persons praising Swift to the heavens, I am tempted to wish them there, with their idol for company through eternity. Swift with his tragic intensity may recall now Lear, now Thersites. But does one not feel sometimes that if life looks like that, it would be more intelligent to hop over a cliff and be silent, than to go nagging on for ever? Is there not something a little petty about such peevishness? Chaucer can smile, even when the heart of Troilus cracks; Shakespeare can jest, even when Cleopatra comes to die. Swift had genius; but surely genius is better when it is not also a disease?

Enough of examples. When one is pleading a case, the great thing is not to claim too much. All I suggest is this. We have reached a state of chaos in which all critical standards of value have broken down. In the past there have been too many; now there are none. Yet there remain certain qualities that for three thousand years men have valued alike in life and in what they have agreed to call great literature—qualities which it has become second nature to most normal minds to find appealing, but which reason and experience also tell us we do well to like. Nobility, intensity, courage, generosity, pity—qualities like these cannot by them-

selves make a poem good, any more than they can make a face beautiful. Socrates looked like a Satyr; though I am sure it was a very charming Satyr. But in a poem, as in a face, no perfection of form in their absence can reach the highest beauty. And in a poem, as in a face, the presence of their opposites—of vulgarity or morbidity or poltroonery or meanness or cruelty—is a flaw for which no perfection of form can atone.

To a Greek this would have been, I think, obvious. Now it is no longer that. So much the worse for us. Unfortunately the moralists long ago began by picking a quarrel with poetry. The trouble with most moralists from Plato onwards is, I think, that they have been themselves so immoral. Neurotic themselves, they have bred neurotics to match them among the poets. For the values common to good living and good poetry seem to me not so much matters of what used to be called "virtue" as, above all, of sane vitality.

Not that one and the same scale of values will hold unchanged for the realm of the poetic imagination and for the real world. No doubt Milton or Michelangelo would have been ill to live with; Marlowe was no model citizen. Their energy was too vigorous for suburbs. But values vary even with earthly frontiers to some extent, between Paris and London; that is not to say they can therefore be ignored or turned topsy-turvy.

Nor need writers like Swift or Baudelaire be denied greatness, because there was so much about them neither sane nor sound. On the one hand, they still keep an intensity of passion however poisoned, an intensity of life however drunk with death, very different from the *lâcheté* and vulgarity, the whimperings and the clatter

of tin wreaths, to which we have been treated since the War; on the other, they created nightmare worlds which our curiosity may well wish to visit, though not to inhabit; just as Odysseus devised how to hear the Sirens' song and would doubtless have managed to find his way into the Venusberg, had it existed then. But he would have managed there too—and here it is important to imitate him—not to fall under the fascination that can turn men to swine, not to forget his rugged Ithaca, "brave nursing-mother of men".

Nor is there any question of inventing some formula by which to approach the judgement of poetry. One does not feel by formula. But this does provide some means of checking and controlling our feelings about a poem by our feelings about life at large; just as in the realm of physical taste we control our instinctive liking for certain kinds of food, if we have any sense, by our other instinctive liking for good health. For our instincts can be fallible alone, and one must sometimes check another. I find it something, if only a pleasant illusion, to feel that judgements of the value of literature can bear *some* relation to the real world; and that one is not completely limited to saying, in effect—"In this sublime form of skittles called Poetry, you like blue skittles and I like red—and there's an end of it." These are, after all, not matters of such indifference. When we waver undecided between one sort of poetry and another, our eyes may be opened for a moment like those of Aeneas, when his mother showed him the mysterious shapes of the Immortals behind the reek of burning Troy; we may seem to see Nature casting into one scale Life itself and into the other Death, as Brennus cast his sword into the

balance on the Capitol, with the cry, like him—"Vae victis!" For the qualities by which men have survived are hardly irrelevant to the survival of literature. One may doubt if it is to "hollow men" that the future world belongs.

Perhaps I may add that this theory did not begin as a theory, but because I have found by spontaneous experience more and more that even the aesthetic pleasure of a poem depends for me on the fineness of the personality glimpsed between its lines; on the spirit of which the body of a book is inevitably the echo and the mould. Herrick, for instance, is not heroic; he is, on the contrary, a superb example of the pure artist; and yet how his work would drop to dust without the graceful gaiety, the humour, and the humanity of the man himself behind! It is not what writers preach that matters; it is what they themselves are. More and more decidedly, as against work that is tainted with mania or cruelty or barbarism, one comes back to the vital and the sane, to Greek poetry, to Chaucer or the Ballads, to Ronsard or Shakespeare, to Keats or Morris or Hardy. And in moments of doubt about the value of a book, I find myself referring it in imagination to a ghostly jury, not of professional critics, but of men and women of this world. To it are invited Horace and Montaigne; the woman's wit of Dorothy Osborne, the sensitive simplicity of Dorothy Wordsworth; the eighteenth-century common sense of Horace Walpole and Madame Geoffrin; Landor with his stormy honesty and Hardy with his quiet irony. Of course, like Owen Glendower, one may call spirits from the vasty deep, and they may not come. Or I may badly mishear what

they say. Certainly they often disagree. But would not any poet prefer such a tribunal, could it but be found, to twelve legions of professors? Do we honestly think Shakespeare would have quitted his "Mermaid" for our lecture-rooms?

And at least, if one is wrong in this refusal to put asunder the values of life and poetry, one is wrong in good company—with Milton who held that the poet's life should be a true poem; with Montaigne for whom the life of "*toute âme bien née*" seemed essentially that; with Anatole France who, sceptic though he was and devoid of literary principles, yet suggested that there was one quality common to the great masters—not style, nor composition, nor taste, but simply that "*ils n'ont pas l'âme basse*". And was not this, ultimately, what Matthew Arnold intended by poetry being "the criticism of life"? Yet what a dismal definition!—that poetry should be criticism of anything! Is it not rather life itself that is the final criticism of poetry?

What, then, of the critics?—what can they do, in practice, most worth doing? Granted that the critic's main business is interpretation, he may treat that as a science or as an art. To scientific critics, from Aristotle to the present day, the objection remains that poetry is a thing which works inside us, and we still know so extremely little about our insides. We may be now beginning to know more. But psychology is young and green as yet. Hitherto, even the generalizations of an Aristotle have worn threadbare in the end. And when some modern anatomist of poetry begins explaining—"This poem makes us feel like this, because. . ."—I find

myself shouting vainly to his deaf page—"But, to begin with, it doesn't make me feel like that in the least." And when he proceeds, unperturbed—"So you see, what people have fondly called poetic magic, was this pretty little bag of tricks"—I cannot muster the profuse gratitude that seems expected in return for this revelation, even were it true. No doubt it is vain to follow Keats in drinking confusion to Newton; Einstein confuses *us*. Let us face the day when every leap of the heart that literature gives us shall be duly charted and analysed in coloured inks; but that day is not yet in sight. And I shall not pray for it. Its dawn may well prove a triumph for science rather than for art. The more we discover of what we call the "unconscious", the more we may doubt the benefit of dragging up into the light of consciousness impulses that for the poets and readers of three thousand years have worked unconsciously. They were wiser than they knew; we may not prove so much wiser when we know.

They that in play can do the thing they would,
 Having an instinct throned in reason's place—
 And every perfect action hath the grace
 Of indolence or thoughtless hardihood—
 These are the best.¹

Further, those who concentrate on these problems seem quickly to forget the existence in poetry of anything but technique. The eye grows short-sighted over the micro-scope; the voice of life calls deadened through a laboratory door. Scott (characteristically enough) in that great book, his *Journal*, tells of Michelangelo calling some Pope a poor creature, because his Holiness turned from

¹ Bridges.

the general effect of a noble figure to criticize the hem of its robe. So much the worse, I suppose, for Michelangelo. Yet one may ask if his form of exaggeration is not at least healthier than its opposite. In the Aran Islands, I gather, they believe that to talk too much of the things of fairy may turn the tongue to stone. It happens. I have seen it.

The critics who have mattered to me were themselves artists who turned literary criticism into literature. They brought to the study of poetry the imagination of poet and novelist in one. *Rasselas* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* are not masterpieces of the first order; but they helped to make Johnson the most vital of English critics. *Volupté*, despite its title, is the dreariest novel I ever groaned through; in his poems Sainte-Beuve was little better; yet his criticism was all the better for both. These men had studied mankind too closely to fall into formulas, or to forget life in aestheticism. "The only end of writing", says Johnson, "is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it." "What I have sought in criticism", writes Sainte-Beuve, "has been to bring into it a certain charm, and at the same time more reality; in a word, both poetry and physiology." This sense of reality in poetry and of poetry in reality, is not an idle nor an easy quality. Taine may serve to show the effect of too much physiology; Coleridge, of too little reality.

Critical interpretation remains then, I feel, an art—an applied art like portrait-painting, or like translation—best handled by minds at once poetic and practical, like Horace and Montaigne, Dryden and Johnson, Goethe and Arnold; or, in our own day, Yeats and Virginia

Woolf, Lytton Strachey and Desmond MacCarthy. It was, above all, the poetry in the treatment of Greek and Latin literature by Gilbert Murray and Mackail, that planted with green for me at school the road to the originals. That this type of imaginative criticism has been badly abused, I know; that is no reason for abusing it. I know that the head of Pater's *La Gioconda* is ready to be brought in on a charger and pitched at me; but if we want a kind of criticism that shall be fool-proof, we must look to another world than this. And if this world is to continue habitable for civilized people, surely we need more, not less, mixing of poetry with the common ways of life.

That is where modern criticism of poetry, I think, has failed us. It is vain to expect too much of any criticism; as Arnold did. Men of the pen overrate the power of the pen. And where criticism has tried to lead the poets, as at the Renaissance, it has often only misled them. But if it be true that artists need a sense of values in life, critics—as artists judging artists—need it doubly. Yet the modern reviewer is usually afraid to say—"This poetry is clever, but its spirit is that of a rabbit imprisoned in a dust-bin"¹—"This satire shows force, but it shows also a vulgar brutality with no sense of the dignity of others or its own". Critics now suppose such things irrelevant; or are afraid of being thought prigs or snobs. Yet the critic who does not feel the sheer aesthetic ugliness of such qualities is as incompetent as a colour-blind person in a picture-gallery. Poetry is not a jewel

¹ I have since been solemnly informed that though some modern poetry may adopt this tone, the poet is only pretending. In spite of this revelation, I still hold that a besetting taste for such impersonations reveals a good deal of the personality behind.

found in the heads of toads. And now in America, I hear, a school of critics has arisen to declare tragedy "out of date", because it needs heroic characters, and modern man has lost faith in his own value. As if Ibsen had not wrung more tragedy out of a wild duck in an attic than out of the fall of the whole ancient world in the face of Christianity! But to-day the individual cowers before Communist and Fascist, before scientist and engineer. Our age is disillusioned, so its intellectual leaders proudly and interminably tell us. What little worms we all are; and what clever little worms to know it so well! One modern poet, in verses peculiarly admired, has lamented that he was not born a healthy lobster. And this sort of neurotic cant is called "sincerity"—the one moral quality ceaselessly on the lips of modern critics. This "vanity of vanities" is supposed to be the latest thing in daring originality; as if there had never been a Preacher in Jerusalem, or such evergreen-sickness were a new thing under the sun! One difference indeed there is; Ecclesiastes, if like so many poets he had lost hope, had not lost also dignity and decency.

The words of Yeats do not apply only to the "troubles" of Ireland—

We who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show
The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.

And again—

We are but critics, or but half create,
Timid, entangled, empty, and abashed.

And because one extreme breeds another, this feebleness finds its counterpart in speeches by politicians

holding it up as the highest crown of human life to litter with senseless carcasses some No Man's Land; and in a Europe that twenty years ago seemed civilized, intellectual freedom is persecuted in State after State with a systematic brutality unequalled since the religious persecutions of the seventeenth century—though there is left to-day no Dante or Milton, no Wordsworth or Byron, to speak for liberty. They might not be heard if there were. Modern poets and their critics between them have cured of ever buying new poetry that wider public for whose grandfathers a new volume by Tennyson or Browning or Arnold was an event. We can guess to-day what it was like to live in the twilight of the Roman Empire, with barbarism flooding back across the Danube and the Rhine; while our poets caress their incomprehensible Muses in select seclusion, like the Emperor Honorius feeding his pet hens in the marshes of Ravenna, as Alaric marched on Rome.

"Consider, for instance," continues meanwhile the voice of the modern critic, "the consummate reserve of this:

Unable in the supervening blankness
To sift TO AGATHON from the chaff
Until he found his sieve. . .
Ultimately, his seismograph."

Alas, the reserve is so "consummate" that it is like to have to do without being considered at all by a harassed world like ours. When Gérard de Nerval promenaded his live lobster on a pink ribbon through the Palais-Royal, it was at least a novelty. To-day the highway of poetry is blocked with lobsters and laboriously eccentric gentlemen, begging the public to stop and overhear them

conversing in private code with the little black egos they trail along our gutters. The public has ceased to stop. And as if it were not enough that living poets should be unintelligible, our critics father the same quality in retrospect upon the dead. In a recent work with the apocalyptic title, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, it has been revealed to an admiring public that the more ways a poem can be misunderstood, the better it is. Take, for example, Herbert's couplet—

Ah, my dear God, though I be clean forgot,
Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.

This, we are informed, means four different things—"If I have stopped loving you, let me go"—"Let me not love you in achievement, if I do not love you in desire"—"Damn me if I don't stick to the parsonage"—and "Do not make me hanker after you, if I would be better under some other master elsewhere." For, our guide proceeds, "it is a very reasonable deduction from the sexual metaphor used by devotional poets that God should in most cases be well scolded as a flirt". The significant point about this sort of thing, which was praised to the skies by stupefied reviewers, is not, I think, that so far from meaning all four things at once the passage does not mean any of them; nor yet that one of the explanations is not even English; nor yet that so much ingenuity is squandered on a Philistine frivolity; but that the attitude to poetry involved is so curiously vulgar. And if there is one thing fatal to the writing or the appreciation of poetry it is surely vulgarity. Men have written well with, in the ordinary sense, bad enough morals; but not with bad manners. When Sir Gawayne arrived in the hall

of the Green Knight, every one whispered overjoyed to his neighbour—"Now shall we see courteous conduct and blameless speech; now we shall learn noble manners." Can we feel they would have been equally rejoiced by the arrival of a contingent of modern gentlemen of letters, polished by six centuries of progress? It does not seem to me a matter of complete indifference that so much of the criticism that piques itself on being most "modern" should—to use the cant of the Communist—be "sabotaging" poetry.

For the qualities that the poets have valued seem to me what a world hag-ridden with theorists needs—above all that sense of the importance of the individual against the collective follies and brutalities of statecraft, which the poets have seldom forgotten, from the *Antigone* to Walt Whitman. We are stupidly afraid of this ferro-concrete colossus of modern science. The world has grown for the moment like some savage chief who has just had installed in his palace an electric-bell; it can think of nothing else, push nothing else, hear nothing else but this feverish tintinnabulation. But the basis of life remains unchanged—we are born, we love, we die—and nothing matters really but the states of mind or feeling, of contemplation or excitement, with which we fill our years; in which respect we are not noticeably better off than Socrates, nor yet noticeably better at producing more people like him. He had no electric-bells to listen to. Instead, he had a Demon. In some respects it worked better. And we have Poetry. The Gods of Hellas had a very able scientist among them, called Hephaestus. They did not tremble before him; they found him useful, but something of a joke; he was lame, for one thing, and

sooty; yet they married him, some say, to Charis, who is Grace; or, as others tell, to Aphrodite, who is Loveliness. Might we not try to bring them together again?

There is indeed a danger that the progress of science may make us at once so powerful and so neurotic with the pace we live at, as to blow our wise selves out of existence altogether. But I believe that a new science may help redress the balance of the old—that science of psychology, of ourselves, which though still so raw has already done much to explain the morbid tangles of the mind and to make easier that directness and sanity which mark the poetry, above all, of Greece. For the poets have often seen clearly enough, since they looked at life as artists, not eaten up with the greed of possessing things, how absurdly we have over-complicated existence; until our minds are like those Victorian drawing-rooms we despise, every spare inch crowded with plush photographs and pincushions and puppies in porcelain. To clear one's life of dusty bric-à-brac—was not that the heart of the matter with Blake and Wordsworth and Arnold, with Morris and Meredith and Hardy? But a neurotic public prefers neurotic poetry. Our own generation, more overstuffed with impressions and more out of breath with chasing wild geese than any before, has made a god in its own likeness out of D. H. Lawrence; for that typical victim of its own diseases—of its industrialism, its barbarism, its brutal love of shouting on the housetops what sensible people have always known and never said—did yet feel instinctively what ailed his age, and had the gift of words to make men listen to the claims of the body, reasserted against the bloodless intellect. And in the same way is it not possible partly to sympa-

thize with another figure equally fanatical, the leader who is trying to make Ireland turn her back on the stupid complexities of our civilization, in a self-sufficing simplicity alone with her Atlantic? In Germany the same exasperated craving for violent living and decisive action has found its figure-head in Hitler. The wages of Decadence are Fascism or Bolshevism. Where now are the intelligentsias of Russia and of Germany? Inevitably, the seedy intellectual calls up the noble savage, not always, alas, very noble; and the modern poet, trying to go one better than Shelley and be "an ineffectual devil" (mainly blue), is the very type that produces in the end, by scorn and loathing for itself, devils but too effectual.

In a word, the values of real life cannot remain without interest to poetry, if poetry is to be again of interest to the world, and not the autobiographical abracadabra of individuals mumbling at themselves in pocket-mirrors. And if its critics cared for such wider issues, they too might help. Yet genius is born without midwives. It can outlive their neglect. Some day we may dare to dream of a new Renaissance of understanding for Greek poetry; a new return to the sanity of Nature, less hysterical than Romanticism was; a new conviction, less narrow than in the age of Thomas Warton, that Nature, and sanity, and the wisdom of the Greek are but three guides in one.

All that I have urged, comes merely to this—that the criticism of poetry, whether professional or our own, though true interpretation be its first aim, unless it has also a keen sense of values remains but a blind sloth upon the Tree of Knowledge; that those values are not mere

matters of subjective caprice—like the fineness of certain faces, they move us despite ourselves, because their worth has outlived in the real world the test of immemorial time; and that criticism cannot neglect these, to concentrate wholly on technical subtleties, without becoming a frivolous and shallow thing. "Good", in life itself as well as literature, is but the name we give to qualities that confer the vital power to survive. What matters in the end seems to me health, not holiness; sanity, not sin. And Beauty is not limited to what can be seen or heard or measured or poked. It is not in anatomical skill that the Laocoon is inferior to Olympia; not in technical cleverness that Dryden yields to Chaucer. Neither for poetry nor for criticism is cleverness enough. We are driven back to "Longinus"—to "the echo of a great soul". And indeed all our explanations of the eternal power of poetry come lamely to their journey's end. In the phrase of Vauvenargues—"Il faut avoir de l'âme pour avoir du goût"; in the words of his brother-soldier and fellow-critic, Sir Philip Sidney, denouncing those who can hear sweet tunes without "ravishing delight"—

Or if they do delight therein, are yet so closed with wit,
 As with sententious lips to set a title vain on it;
 Oh let them hear these sacred tunes, and learn in Wonder's
 schools
 To be, in things past bounds of wit, fools if they be not fools!

CHAPTER VI

ROMANCE AND REALITY; AN ESCAPE FROM LIBRARIES

"Thule, the Period of Cosmographie."

T. WEEBKES (*Madrigals*).

THERE are places with physical beauty; there are places with souls; there are places with both; it is these last that really repay the toil of travel. The Rocky Mountains, the New Zealand Alps may dazzle the eyes: but they have short memories. To Europeans they seem half upstarts—centuries younger than ourselves—almost as recent as a Victorian sofa. We turn back from their dumb and barren beauty to "l'Europe aux anciens parapets", to the ghosts that haunt the very syllables of a name like Elsinore.

The souls of places are not, indeed, immortal. They may be killed by sacrilege; they may die of overworship. Stonehenge sickened, when the twentieth century considerably surrounded it with a girdle of barbed wire and tin buildings. The "sweet Colonus" of Sophocles has sunk to a trammy slum. A vulgarized Stratford might have wrung anew from Keats, even more bitterly than the sight of Burns's cottage being exploited, that angry cry—"O the flummery of a birthplace. Cant! Cant! Cant! It is enough to give a spirit the guts-ache." Fifty parked charabancs do not leave much of Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey. And Tennyson's Freshwater has been trampled to death by the Gadarene passion of the English middle-classes for rushing in headlong herds to the sea.

But it is their blending of human memories with Nature unspoiled that makes enchanted countries, still, of Iceland or Ireland, Italy or Greece. This is the true fountain of Trevi, that fascinates the traveller to return.

Coleridge felt otherwise—"I believe I should walk over the plain of Marathon without taking more interest in it than in any other plain of similar features." And there is a certain ring of complacency about his contrast of himself with Sir Walter Scott, who moved everywhere with his head in a flying cloud of associations; or with Johnson, who had written—"That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona". Coleridge thought he was quite a lot "to be envied". The imaginative metaphysician who found refuge from dusty reality alike in poetry, philosophy, and opium, was not sorry to feel superior to mere accidents of place; and yet, remembering how he also once thanked God in public that he could not pronounce correctly a single sentence of French, we may find Coleridge a little apt to be over-grateful for mercies that were smaller than he thought. The great dramas of human life, like those of the Elizabethan theatre, cannot be felt to the full without some knowledge also of the stage where they were played. And how much of poetry itself consists in this very power of drawing pleasure from associations!

I doe love these auncient ruynes:
We never tread upon them, but we set
Our foote upon some reverend History.

So it is with Iceland. There are indeed hardly more ruins than snakes in this land perpetually convulsed by

its volcanoes; yet there are few countries where the traveller feels more History underfoot. It is far from "reverend History", most of it; it is not particularly "auncient", for this outpost of Europe has only been inhabited at all for just over a thousand years; its period of vivid interest covers only a small fraction even of that; yet nowhere is the past less buried or more vividly alive in a nation's consciousness. Many visit Iceland simply for its fish, or for its geysers, volcanoes, and midnight-suns. But geysers, volcanoes, and midnight-suns may leave one as cold as fish; what can still make worth while the risk of wasting eight days of life in seasick misery is the call not only of a desert island, but of a haunted one.

"Haunted by what?" asks the smiling intellectual, long hardened against the blandishments of that poor adventuress, Romance. "By the ghosts of a few man-slayers who hacked their way through violent lives to violent deaths nine hundred years ago!—the sort of ruffian-gangster that to-day becomes a 'public enemy' in America or a national hero in Germany!" Even the sensible and far from unromantic Horace Walpole long since complained in the same strain of Gray's *Descent of Odin*—"Who can care through what horrors a Runic savage arrived at all the joys and glories they could conceive, the supreme felicity of boozing ale out of the skull of an enemy in Odin's hall?"

Certainly it is a strange and savage world at first sight—where children start killing at the age of seven, or fathers run berserk at their own offspring and chase their nurses over cliffs into the sea; where the family-idiot is left all day to graze out in the fields, tethered like a calf

to a hollow stone; where a pillow-fight between husband and wife, begun in play, can end in divorce; where parents get rid of importunate suitors for a daughter's hand by broiling them in a hot bath. And still queerer things occur—swords shriek with vexation at being pulled from the sheath without due ceremony; supernatural seals poke up sudden heads through the dining-room floor, or swim in horrid fashion, rolling human eyes in their heads, round a doomed ship; ghosts of ghastly solidity, wearing their own dead bodies, but larger than life, ride crashing on the roof-trees of their old homes; or warlocks are stoned to death with seal-skin bags pulled over their heads against the evil eye, yet manage by peering through some hole in it to blast a whole hillside in their last agony.

And yet even in the century of "Good Sense" Gray, who was himself so much a classic and so little a berserk, felt the glamour not only of "fields Ilissus laves", but also of these grey fells and fiords of the North. For Greece and Iceland are less far apart than they look. The Icelanders of the Sagas have many traits that are, in the best sense, Homeric. They suggest what the rude forefathers of Homer's heroes may have been like, before their race came down from the Danube to be softened and polished by the southern sun and the culture of the Mediterranean. Like Homer—though they lack his gold-and-ivory hexameter—the Saga-tellers are never mean; never sordid; never rhetorical, hysterical, or false. And like Ibsen these ancestors of his still keep, under the prosaic surface of the figures they have carved beside the beaten tracks of everyday life, the living rock of poetry. The characters of Icelandic story, with all their

folly, their recklessness, their cruelty, possess also the force and power and dignity of Tragedy.

What are, in fact, the qualities that go to make what we call "tragic characters"? First of all, character. The Icelanders of the tenth century, like their descendants in the twentieth, strike the stranger as the most individualistic race on earth. Nothing could be remoter from that German or Russian mass-mindedness, which soon grows homesick for the crack of a whip and dreams of no finer progress in life than to march in fours to the Right or Left. This starved and storm-swept land of volcano and morass was first colonized by men who cast loose from Norway and drove their frail keels out into the uncharted wastes of the North Atlantic sooner than stoop to a master. No doubt King Harald Hairfair had "Progress" on his side when he set out to hammer his nation into a single state. But to these countrymen of his the Iceland lava and the Greenland ice-floes seemed better, with Liberty, than the homes of their fathers without. They had not heard of "economic determinism"; but of determination they had little to learn.

Good hap to the fresh fierce weather,

The quiver and beat of the sea!

While three men hold together,

The Kingdoms are less by three.

Out to the sea with her there,

Out with her over the sand!

Let the Kings keep the earth for their share,

We have done with the sharers of land.¹

"At the Mula Thing", says Torgny the Lawman to King Olaf of Sweden in the *Heimskringla*, "they pitched down a well five Kings who had been as insolent as thou

¹ Swinburne, *A Song in Time of Order*, 1852.

art now to us." There speaks already the same insurgent spirit as lives again in Milton's Prince of Hell; as made Cromwell bluntly answer, when asked what he would do if he met the king himself in battle, "Fire my pistol at him"; or again, in the wittier vein of the eighteenth century, inspired Lord Peterborough's reply to the monk at Rheims who was showing him the holy oil used to consecrate the kings of France—"Et, Monsieur, est-ce que vous aussi, vous sacrez vos rois?"—"Non, nous les massacrons". In spite of Goethe's lilting ballad, Thule has never been a land for kings. The Icclander of Saga days, with neither monarch nor magistrate, Army nor Church, isolated on his lonely farmstead between the fells he grazed and the sea he fished, and riding yearly as his own representative to the Thing, enjoyed an independence in comparison with which even the most democratic citizen of ancient Athens spent his life in leading-strings.

With this reckless individualism went a ruthless courage. The one was indeed the condition of the other. Not that courage in itself always seems very interesting to-day. Lions, we have come to feel, make dull *dramatis personae*; and courage, as the War showed, is still almost too common—at least the physical courage of the huntsman leaping a ditch, or of the soldier dying in one. In this primitive Scandinavian world, as might be expected, such courage is commoner still. "Often deemed the Swedes that they saw Odin before great battles; to some he gave victory, others he called to himself; either fate seemed good to them." "It was these berserks' custom, when they felt their fury coming on them and no enemy was in sight, to land and wrestle

with trees or great boulders, or to fall upon each other.” “They alone seemed worthy of the name of Sea-kings, who never slept beneath sooty rafters, nor drank in the inglenook.” “When Eric was *twelve* years old, King Harald gave him five longships and east they went raiding.” “I may as well humour my father”, says Skarphedinn in the *Njála*, “by being burnt indoors with him, for I am not afraid of death.” And he is good as his word, where his own better judgement would have saved him. But though such wild hardihood extorts our admiration, it remains the uncomfortable and slightly repelled admiration with which we read of the inhuman fortitude of early Christians between the teeth of lions. We are more stirred by the fierce beauty of the language and its stark simplicity; and we feel more sympathy with Grettir for being afraid of the dark than for not being afraid of any other mortal—or immortal—thing.

But there is also a rarer kind of courage which helps to lift the Sagas to the height of Tragedy—that calmer, more intelligent, and more moving gallantry of men who face with unaverted eyes the darkness of all human life, or quietly contemplate their own coming doom, knowing it vain to avoid—the courage of Homer’s Sarpedon with his unrepining sadness, or of Hector fighting for the walls he knows well he cannot save. These Icelanders go the ways of fate with the same unfaltering vitality, too strong to lean on the crutches of hope. Typical is that Hord in the tale of the Holm-dwellers, whom no “glamour” could ever cheat into seeing things as they were not—a fit ancestor for our own Thomas Hardy. Again, Jarl Sigurd of the Orkneys, faced with desperate odds, asks counsel of his mother. “Had I known”, the

old woman grimly answers, with a far-off echo of Sarpedon in the *Iliad*, "that thou wouldst love to live for ever, I would have kept thee safe this long while in my wool-bag. But know that it is not the road a man takes, that rules his life; it is fate. Better fall with honour than live with shame." For victory she gave him a magic raven-banner, that seemed to flap its wings as it waved; yet its hidden doom was that its standard-bearer should always fall. So all went well with the Jarl for a while; until, in his last battle, with his men dropping all round him, he seized it jestingly in his own hand and perished likewise on the swords of the Irish at Clontarf.

This sense of destiny haunts the Icelandic Sagas, as it haunts the Attic stage. Gunnar, Grettir, Gisli Sursson—each foreknows his fate. They are as determinist as Calvin; and yet, by the same paradox, as determined. But the pagan Northman had not Calvin's consoling certainty of bliss beyond the grave. Their beliefs about the hereafter remained shadowy. A man might live on as a prisoner, or even a grisly vampire, in his grave-howe; or he might find for a time in Valhalla a martial Paradise—but only till the Twilight of the Gods, unlike the Christian Day of Judgement, should bring triumph to the Powers of Evil, and to the brave only the last honour of falling in battle yet once more, on Odin's side. Vaguer still was their dream of some new happiness to arise beyond the ruins of the final chaos.

All this makes a bleak picture of the world. Yet suicide, as in Homer, is hardly heard of in the Sagas; whereas the tragedies of Athens, like Ibsen, are full of it. For, as time passes, men's old energy and zest for life give place to subtler brains and frailer nerves. But these

tireless adventurers never dream of refuge in the safety of the grave; just as even their women's hearts are seldom weak enough to break like Refna's, when her husband Kiartan has been brought to death by his old love Gudrun; instead, like Gudrun herself, they clench their unflinching grip on life through all disasters, from love to love, from sorrow to sorrow. "Man", says their stoic proverb, "must outlive man." Or in the words of Morris's neglected *Sigurd the Volsung*, which has caught with such fire and splendour the spirit of the North:

What else is the wont of the Niblungs, why else by the
 gods were they wrought,
Save to wear down lamentation and to make all sorrow
 nought?

Such was the energy of this Scandinavian race that in the space of a few generations drove its dragon-ships east to the White Sea and west to New England; spread the terror of its raven-banners from Ireland to Byzantium; founded new states in Iceland, Normandy, England, Sicily, and Russia; and left, for its fit memorial among us, the massive dignity of those blunt Norman arches which the lighter ogives of later centuries often surmount, seldom surpass.

Yet it is not so much for movements or monuments that our imagination cares, as for men. And the figures of the Sagas, nine centuries away, remain still so near and natural that beside them the heroes of many a modern play or novel seem cardboard puppets, glued together with rhetoric and jerked on wires of hysteria. One fantastic and estranging convention does indeed dominate these Icelanders—the Tragic Error from which most of their Saga-tragedies arise—the sacred

duty of vendetta. Yet even this is less defeating to our sympathy—vindictiveness has not yet vanished from our world—than, say, the demented frenzies of Oedipus over actions done in complete ignorance, and therefore in complete innocence, or than the fairy-tale incredibilities of *King Lear*. And apart from this one point of honour about taking life for life no race in all mediaeval Europe seems so calmly practical and unfantastic, so free from manias and superstitions. None, whether under paganism or Christianity, has led its life in this world less perturbed by notions about the next. Even a specially pious pagan will be described, curiously to our ears, as “a great *friend* to Thor”. And the best of such “friends” were not afraid to quarrel. Hrafnkel, Frey’s priest, so loved his god that he shared his favourite horse with Frey alone and vowed to kill any mortal that dared profane its back. One day he found himself unwillingly constrained by that vow to kill his own servant. Ruined, humiliated, nearly killed in the vendetta that ensued, with none of Job’s patience he bursts out, “I hold it mere foolery to trow on gods”; and from that day renounces all worship. Yet this blasphemy does not prevent him from later recovering his old position, and living happily ever after. Again, Helgi the Lean, another example quoted by Mr Eddison in his admirable edition of *Egil’s Saga*, “was much mixed in his faith; he trowed on Christ and named his homestead after Him; and yet called he upon Thor on sea-voyages and hard occasions”. It is as practical as the decision of one Japanese emperor that a single courtier should experimentally embrace Buddhism, to see if he fared the better. And when in A.D. 1000 Christianity reached Iceland,

it proved the occasion, not as elsewhere for sword and faggot, but for an admirable display of Parliamentary wisdom; after tempers had risen dangerously, the Speaker carried the compromise that the new faith should be adopted publicly, but paganism still tolerated in private.

The race was, indeed, by nature too unruly to be deeply religious. Their legendary heroes had faced Odin himself in battle and felt proud "to beseech no man for his helping and to vex no god with prayer". It was characteristic that even the Christian missionary Thangbrand should have been himself the most pugnacious of men; exchanging apostolic blows and knocks with the heathen; fighting duels with a crucifix on his shield; and killing, amongst others, a poet who had dared lampoon him. And one is not surprised to read how the Scandinavian Scots of Caithness, having a difference with the Church on the tithe-question, tersely concluded, "Short rede is good rede; slay we the Bishop"—and set about burning him in his palace then and there.

But though the spirit of Saga Iceland was thus realistic, it was not deaf to romance. And yet here it is of interest that the hero of the most romantic of all the Sagas betrays by his name the presence of that Irish strain which is strongly marked in the Iceland of his day. Cormac the Poet, the lover of Steingerd, was so cursed that, when he might have her, he would not, and when he might not, pursued her passionately. It proved his lot never to win her; only to found Scarborough and leave a story of the heart's perversity that would have delighted Proust. Is it fanciful to see here a characteristic difference between the tempers of the two races?—between Scandinavian practicality and that wistful Irish yearning for the gold

at the rainbow's foot, for irretrievable past or unattainable future, coupled with disdain for all the present offers? Certainly one of the most typical traits of the Icelandic character, ancient or modern, might be summed up by saying that it does *not* "yearn".

If this sturdy sanity stood by itself, it might seem admirable, and yet not altogether amiable. Sanity can be, as with the Swiss, a rather prosaic quality. Prose, and the plainest prose, is indeed the staple of the Sagas; and their brief verse-interludes strike most moderns as detestably artificial. But if their writers can still grip the imagination and draw seasick travellers to their distant home, it is because behind their terseness and their fearless common sense there lies also a deep sensitiveness to style and poetry, alike in word and deed. This race has not only an iron morale; it has also an art, iron in its reticence.

The reticence, at least, none will question. Never, since ancient Sparta gave its name to "laconism", had a nation less taste for rhetoric. Often these Saga-characters, like those of Aeschylus, when their feelings are most passionate, will not speak at all. When Skallagrim refused to enter the service of Harald Hairfair, "the King was silent and sat blood-red to see". King Sigurd of Norway, the Crusader, falling sick, is abandoned for his soul's sake by that Cecilia with whom he had made a left-handed marriage—"The King said: 'Little did I think thou too wouldst leave me like the rest'. And he turned away and his face was red as blood." Gudrun, likewise, hearing Kiartan loves the Princess of Norway instead of her, answers only, "He deserves a good wife"; and turns "blood-red". Or again the just and generous

Blundketil wakes to find his house treacherously fired. "Blundketil asked if any means might get him peace. But Thorir answered, 'There is nought for it but to burn'. And they departed not till every man's child in the place was burnt." No vain invective, no virtuous indignation; neither from the hero of the story, nor its teller. "There is nought for it but to burn." It is only after reading whole Sagas, or watching the passionate interest still taken in them by the modern Icclander, that one realises how far this reticence lies from mere insensibility.

Similarly, after Jarl Hacon's defeat of the Jomsvikings at Hjorungavag one of the vanquished manages to shoot from his ship a last arrow that nearly hits the Jarl himself on shore. "Some went on board," says Snorri in the *Heimskringla* (the Lives of the Kings of Norway), "and found Howard the Hewer standing on his knees by the ship's bulwark; for his legs were smitten from under him. He had the bow in his hand. And when they came on board, Howard asked, 'Who was it that fell?' They said it was one Gissur. 'Then my luck was not so good as I hoped.' 'It was bad luck enough,' they answered, 'and you shall do no more.' And they slew him." More calmly still Grettir's brother Atli, treacherously run through the body at his own door, observes with his dying breath, "They use broad spear-heads these days". More imaginative, but no less stoical, is the parting of Grettir himself from the mother he knows he will never see again: "Weep not, mother. It shall be said, if they attack us, that it was sons you bore, not daughters. Live well—fare well." And yet under this loathing of heroics, so inrooted that it not only says little, but hints even that little, if possible, by some dry innuendo, there

can lurk passions as scalding and as changeless as the hot springs whose mist-wraiths dance for ever in the lonely silence of the Iceland dales. The knightly Gunnar, trapped by his enemies in his house at Lithend, holds them off with arrows till suddenly his bow-string snaps. He calls to his wife Hallgerda, by whose vicious pride the whole feud has come upon him, to give him quickly some of her long hair. "'Does aught hang on it?'" says she. 'My life hangs on it,' said he, 'for they will never get to grips with me, if I can but hold them off with my bow.' 'Well,' she says, 'now I call to mind how once you slapped my face; and I care never a whit whether it is a long while you hold out or a short.'" "Every man has his own pride," answers Gunnar, "I will not ask again." Then his enemies break in and hew him down.

To turn from this steeley brevity of nine centuries ago to the rhodomontades now provided for Europe's daily fare by a Mussolini, a Goebbels, or a Hitler seems as much a return to the infantile as to lay down Tacitus and open *The Three Bears*. Yet, though brevity¹ be "the soul of wit", some may still complain that this form of it is a little lacking in body. Certainly there is small merit in saying little, if one simply has little to say. This Icelandic terseness may be thought mere obtuseness; as Jane Austen's irony may seem mere *naïveté*; but not for long. They have imagery and figures of speech in plenty at command, when they choose to use them. And their

¹ This characteristic is shared, apparently, even by Icelandic livestock. A nineteenth-century collection of folklore tells how a man hid himself in a byre to hear the cows talk, as they do every Yule Eve. Next morning he was found raving and only able to relate that suddenly one cow had said, "Time to talk". And a second—"Man in byre". Then a third—"Drive him mad". And a fourth—"Before dawn". After which he could recall no more.

images are not the less vivid for being often so homely; like the "wool-bag" of Jarl Sigurd's mother. Thus of great expectations it will be sardonically said, "They found they had a smaller steak on the spit than they supposed". And again, "Seldom a sleeping wolf gets a thigh-bone"; "Sharp bites a starving louse". A garrulous person is "no longer silent than the cuckoo"; or "tall in talk as a fox's tail is long". (Always this recurrent contempt for loquacity.) After the battle in Swanfirth, Snorri the Priest notices that Snorri Thorbrandsson "made little play with the cheese, and asked why he ate so slowly. Snorri Thorbrandsson answered that lambs found it hard to eat when they were gagged. Then Snorri the Priest put one hand down his throat and found an arrow sticking athwart his gullet and the roots of his tongue. So Snorri the Priest took tongs and pulled out the arrow; and Snorri Thorbrandsson fell to his meat." As homely, though less heroic, is that vivid phrase in the *Heimskringla* where Snorri tells of Bishop Magne's rebuke to King Sigurd for wishing to marry Cecilia in place of his queen: "Sigurd the Priest said the Heavens seemed to him as small as a calfskin, in his terror at the wrath on the King's face". And at the supreme moment of the *Laxdaela*, when Gudrun has goaded the man she has married, but does not love, to kill his dearest friend, whom she loves but has seen marry another, her words grow stark in their nakedness. "It has been a good day's work—I have spun wool for a twelve-ell web and you have killed Kiartan.... But what pleases me most is that Refna" (the dead man's wife) "will not laugh as she goes to bed this night."

This mingling of the terrible with the trivial, until it

too becomes terrible—the secret Shakespeare used when he made fallen kings fumble with buttons—is one of the staple resources of the Saga-teller's art. It is no mere ignorance. This race, as passionate as Emily Brontë, had all her sense of tragedy, and of tragedy's one consolation—its splendour. "Our pain", says one, "shall be other men's delight." It happens to be the exact counterpart of a phrase in the *Trojan Women* of Euripides. When Gudrun, old, blind, and a nun, sums up her own life, so spendthrift of love, it is with a noble simplicity that no longer seems homely: "I did the worst to him I loved the best". And here again rings out a spontaneous echo of the end of *Carmen* and one more confirmation of Aristotle's judgement, that the most tragic theme of all is that Tragedy of Errors where by life's remorseless irony it is their own blindness, not fortune, nor their enemies, that destroys men, or drives them to kill the thing they love.

It is this deliberate self-control, no mere unsophistication, that leaves the great moments of the Sagas "so noble and so bare". The burners of Njál's home offer life to the old man, with whom they have no quarrel; quietly he refuses—he will not survive the sons he is now too old to avenge. They repeat the offer to his wife. "'I was given to Njál when I was young,' said Bergthora, 'and I promised him this, that we would share one fate.' Then they both went back into the house. 'What counsel shall we take now?' said Bergthora. 'We will go to our bed', said Njál, 'and lay us down. I have long craved for rest.'" I know nothing comparable, except some moments in the Bible, and in Greek poetry; when, for instance, Odysseus ends his story of the last agony of

his comrades lost at sea with the whispered half-line "and God took away their home-coming". To-day there is a fashion for crying up "complexity" as the secret of great literature (as if greatness had any one secret!); and critics spend their time improving past literature by discovering between its lines new complexities, of which its authors never dreamed; until one has visions of Shakespeare's audiences at the Globe sitting in rows with wet towels swathed about their heads. And yet if we set the simplicity of Homer or the *Njǫla* beside some piece of Donne or Hopkins all perspiring with conceits, can we doubt which is more likely to go on appealing to that not negligible portion of mankind that lives outside libraries? And shall we think them wrong?

But the Sagas are not always so sternly simple, nor their imagination so firmly curbed and bitted. These minds that do not reckon overmuch of gods, are set wildly working by ghosts and warlocks, omens and forebodings. Few things they have left us can equal the fight of Grettir with the dead Glam, or the hauntings at Fródá. The vision of Theoclymenus in the Hall at Ithaca, before the slaying of the Suitors, is not more powerful than the second-sight of Thorbiorn before the Battle on the Heath. "I seem to see both gable-walls fallen from the house; and it is as if a great river were flooding through the Hall from the north of the Heath; and of mould, it seems, and nought else tastes the cheese in my mouth." And again, before the drowning of Thorstein Codbiter, "On an evening of harvest a shepherd of Thorstein's went after his sheep to northward of Holyfell; and there he saw the Fell opened on its northern side and in the Fell he saw great fires blazing and heard

a great clamour there and the clash of drinking-horns; and when he listened, if haply he might make out some snatch of their talk, he heard men shouting welcome to Thorstein Codbiter and his crew, and he was bidden sit in the High-seat, over against his father." More poignant still in their proud brevity are the boding words of Einar Tambarskelver, King Olaf Trygvason's bowman, in the last fight at Svold. Suddenly his bow is snapped by a hostile arrow. "Then shouted King Olaf, 'What broke there so loudly?' And Einar answered, 'Norway from thy hand, O King!'"

Landscape and Nature, the bleak beauty of their northern world, inspire these fighters less. Only rarely comes an eye-opening phrase, such as "the coal-blue sea". And yet when we are tempted to make the mistake, as with the Greeks, of thinking they cared little for such things, suddenly we find one of them going to his death because he cared too much. Gunnar of Lithend, sentenced to three winters' outlawry from Iceland, was riding down to take ship, when his horse stumbled and threw him. "He turned and looked back towards the Lithe and his homestead at Lithend and said, 'Fair is the Lithe—so fair that it never seemed to me so fair. The cornfields are white to harvest, and the homestead is mown. Now I will ride back homeward and not fare abroad at all.'" From that moment his enemies could legally kill him. They did not fail.

There are, indeed, two particular exceptions to the curt laconism of Saga Iceland—their Verse and their Law. The most artificial of our eighteenth-century rhymers would have turned pale at the orgies of ornamental periphrasis extemporized by an Icelandic scald;

and their love of ceremonious legal quibbling has bequeathed us some of their dullest passages. Yet there are moments when a touch of poetic imagination transfigures even these formulas; as in this curse pronounced on the breaker of a truce, "He shall be an outlaw and a wolf, alike where Christians pray and pagans worship; where flame burns and earth breeds; where child lisps mother's name and mother brings forth child; where fire is kindled or ships sail; where shields flash, sun shines, snow lies, Finn skis, fir grows, falcon flies daylong with fair breeze beneath her wings; where Heaven rolls and earth is tilled; where wind blows cloud to seaward and where corn is sown". The *Prose Edda*, again, of Snorri Sturlason (1178-1241), a manual of poetry with a digest of the old pagan mythology, contains passages with a wildness of fantasy worthy of Celtic legend. Such is its allegory of the origin of poetry itself—"the Scald's Mead"—which was first made from the blood of Kvasir the Wise, mingled with honey. Kvasir is long forgotten; but from the heart's blood of experience, mingled with the sweetness of song, flows still the poets' wine. And again the Fetter of the Fenris Wolf, with whose breaking loose one day the world itself shall end, is fashioned, says Snorri, from six things—"the noise of a cat's footsteps, the beard of a woman, the roots of a rock, the sinews of a bear, the breath of a fish, and the spittle of a bird". As for the Fenris Wolf himself, he is so huge that, even when his lower jaw rests on the earth and his muzzle touches the sky, he still cannot gape to the full. As a final example both of the spirit and the imagination of the race nothing could serve better than part of the description of the Last Day when the Wolf

at last breaks free, in the verse of the *Elder Edda*—the so-called *Volospá* or *Sibyl's Prophecy* (? c. A.D. 1000). For this has not encrusted itself with the elaborate affectations that defeat most modern readers in the scattered verses of the Sagas themselves.

Far things forgotten, things far before me
 I see—the murk sunset of the Immortals.
 Brother with brother shall grapple in battle;
 Kin that are closest shall couple, and care not;
 Harsh shall the world wax, with hatreds and whoredoms—
 An axe-age, a sword-age, when shields shall be shattered,
 A storm-age, a wolf-age, ere the world's ending...
 The Hound of Hell at his cave-mouth is howling;
 Now fail shall his fetters, the Wolf fare free...

A cock with a comb red as flame is a-crowing—
 "Fialar" they call him—in Cackle Coppice.
 "Gold-comb" in God-home crows to the Æsir,
 To rally the ranks of the Father of Battles.
 Far under earth, in Hell-deep hidden
 Crows yet another, red as soot when it smoulders.
 The Hound of Hell at his cave-mouth is howling;
 Now fail shall his fetters, the Wolf fare free...

How fare the Æsir? How fare the Elves now?
 Loud rumbles Giant-land. The Æsir assemble.
 Wildly the Dwarfs by their rock-doors are weeping,
 The folk of the fell-crag. Now wot ye what cometh?...
 The granite-peaks crumble, and sheer crash the gorges.
 The Dead march from Hell-gate, and rent are the Heavens.
 The Hound of Hell at his cave-mouth is howling;
 Now fail shall his fetters, the Wolf fare free.

Bleakness yet grandeur, robustness yet imagination,
 stoicism yet passion—such is the lasting impression that
 this literature leaves. It too can claim that noble praise
 bestowed by Samuel Daniel on our own—

When all that ever hotter sprites expressed
 Comes *better'd by the patience of the North.*

As bleakly splendid is the vision that the reader forms of the island where such tales were told, with its mingling of fire and ice, of black lava, green fell, blue firth. But fireside visions based on the legends of nine centuries ago may be visionary indeed. It remained to go and see.

The journey to Iceland, like its Sagas, alternates poetry with prose. On the July morning when we set out for Hull, even after months of drought—and years of motor traffic—beyond the towers of Peterborough the green spaciousness of Lincolnshire still stretched unspoilt into the north, shimmering under the heat-haze of an early summer's day. For the highways of East Lincolnshire have been largely saved from the drab hardening of most of England's arterics, thanks to that great gash hewn in the flank of Britain by the spear-head of the Humber, which severs all northward running roads to east of Gainsborough and Goole. And so the triple towers of Lincoln Minster still look from their proud hill-top over a country-side not greatly changed since little St Hugh was laid by the altar to his rest—

And a' the bells o' merry Lincoln
Without men's hands were rung;
And a' the books o' merry Lincoln
Were read without man's tongue;
And never was such a burial
Sin' Adam's day begun.

But from the poetry of "merry Lincoln" Hull brings an abrupt descent to prose. At a drab dockside, with a hinterland of slum, lay loading the s.s. *Godafoss*. Its mere two thousand tons looked dismayingly small; but that evening the sea itself lay as flat as the long low

coast, when at last we had crawled out of dock, dropped our pilot at Humbermouth, and swung round Spurn Head towards the grey haze of the north. Westward a great black bastion of cloud, its pinnacles on fire with the sunset, hid with its brooding darkness the drouth of England.

Our company of pilgrims would have amused Chaucer. They seemed an epitome of this motley modern world on which we were turning our backs for five weeks to come. Even here the War pursued us, in the shape of a tall, crop-headed, sallow and melancholy German Major, whose pouchy eyes and protruding neck suggested some sad and many-summered tortoise, with a heavier load upon his back than he could bear. The flames of long-forgotten bombardments seemed still to smoulder in those moody eyes, as he stared at the cabin tablecloth or paced the deck, field-glasses in hand; ever and again sweeping the horizon, as if in search of the lost fleet of Germany. The gloom of his meditations was only at moments brightened by the sight of the cherished son of twelve or so, whom he was rearing as an infant Hannibal. One evening a few of the younger passengers were dancing to a gramophone on a corner of the narrow deck. "The young don't do that in Germany", he said sombrely. He seemed one of the dead of the Western Front, come back to look for more. Actually, we gathered, he was collecting Nordic inspiration—the legends of the freest race in Europe to be degraded into propaganda in a servile Germany grovelling under the boot of Hitler. But no sense of irony vexes the German soul.

The Reich was also represented by two corpulent and opulent Jews, who exchanged somewhat frigid salutations with the Major. Dealers in antiques, so we

were told, they had somehow contrived to square the Aryan oppressor and escape for a trip to Iceland; and were combining business with pleasure, by bringing with them a consignment of Persian rugs to unload on the rich of Reykjavik.

A pleasant contrast to this German contingent, and a typical example of the wealth, health, and spirits with which the upper classes of Great Britain, by knack or luck, emerge from the greatest wars, was provided by a couple of calmly amused young women, one English, one Anglo-Irish, who came on board looking as if they had just dismounted from their hunters. They were bent on fishing and bird-gazing in Iceland; as a stepping-stone, in some future summer, to the amenities of Greenland. And the traditional eccentricities of England were represented by a rather pathetic and elderly figure, like a retired grocer, in shabby clothes set off with spats, who shuffled about the ship with an air between forlornness and profundity and amused himself by putting Socratic questions to the young Icelanders of either sex on board—"Now tell me, what do you know? Do you know anything?" Stupefied silence. "Do you know the sun'll rise to-morrow?" They modestly thought they might go so far as that. "Ah, but it won't! It doesn't *rise*!" When they had recovered enough to ask politely in their turn, as well they might, what he was proposing to do in Iceland, he would reply mysteriously, "Buy it". He reappeared on the return voyage, looking more pathetic than ever; but with no sign of Iceland in his pocket.

This Babel was completed by a learned Dutch professor, crammed with Sagas and fascinated by Iceland

into making this his fifth visit, at the head of a consignment of Dutch students of both sexes for work on the farms; a charming Danish attaché and his wife from the Legation in London; and various young Icelanders homeward bound from the Old World and the New.

July 11, evening. Hardly a glimpse of land in the twenty-four hours since leaving Hull—only the elbow of Scotland by Peterhead and then, a few hours later, the headland of Duncansby, the N.E. tip of Great Britain; in the dusk a lighthouse high on the desolate cliff was beginning to sweep the grey horizon where the North Sea meets the Pentland Firth and the roll of the North Atlantic. To the right the dark outlines of the Orkneys loomed through the twilight, guarding Scapa Flow. Most of the time, nothing but sea and sky; with sometimes a little lonely trawler tossing across the grey wilderness, or some seabird still lonelier, flying straight onward between the two infinities of wave and cloud. In the thickening darkness we missed Sule Skerry, where dwelt the Great Silkie of the Ballad.¹

July 13. Each day the sunsets become more unearthly, as they shift farther to the north, and the nights grow lighter. This evening transformed the Atlantic rollers to molten green metal, in a furnace wide as the world; with the last

¹ *Silkie*, seal. He has a child by a mortal maid.

"I am a man upo' the lan',
An' I am a silkie in the sea;
And when I'm far and far frae lan',
My dwelling is in Sule Skerrie...

An' it sall pass on a simmer's day,
When the sin shines het on evera stane,
That I will tak my little young son,
An' teach him for to swim his lane.

An' thu sall marry a proud gunner,
An' a proud gunner I'm sure he'll be,
An' the very first schot that ere he schoots,
He'll schoot baith my young son and me."

sunlight making patches of wrinkled golden slag on their backs as they heaved past, until the whole sweep of the sea seemed like the scaly corrugated skin of the Midgard Serpent, risen from the depths below, where he sleeps till the Twilight of the Gods. Long after the sun has vanished to creep his short journey behind the hillock of the Pole, the sky burns on with pale reds and yellows; as if from the reflected glare of some unknown land on fire beyond the sea's northern rim.

July 14. Late last night from the grey bank of ragged storm-clouds along the horizon there rose up, far away, like the dark heads of giants, the first of the Iceland Jökulls. At two this morning our siren blew, like Childe Roland's "slug-horn" at the gate of the Dark Tower; it was an unforgettable moment, to come on deck in the pallid glimmer of that Purgatorial twilight and find rising all round the ship, fantastic as if they had really been the portal of some Netherworld, the Westman Isles—great ramparts of cliff falling sheer to a land-locked sea and crowned by slopes of grass mounting almost as steeply, like the roofs of a mediaeval château, to meet the sky. Their base was white with the breakers; their sides, with the agelong droppings of the seabirds. Not even the first sight from the Ionian Sea of the cloud-raked mountains of Epirus at the gates of Greece makes so overwhelming an entrance to an unknown land.

As if these gaunt rock-pinnacles in the twilight really had been that Shore of the Dead reached by Odysseus in the dimness of the Western Sea, there now appeared a spectral craft. But as it drew closer, it turned from Charon's barge to a tub-shaped motor-boat, chugging towards us with goods and passengers from the little quay—among them some young women dressed in the most up-to-date fashion. It brought back memories of watching a Greek country-girl toiling *in high heels* up the rugged headland of Trikeri, itself hardly changed since Argo landed there. For other deities may die or vanish before the march of science; but She whose favourite shrine was once Paphos, and is now Paris, grows only more powerful. To-day in a twinkling of her eye the women of two hemispheres are instantaneously transformed. Even summer and winter, day and night,

can only cover half the globe at a time; but the Fashions of the modern Aphrodite with a single gesture girdle the whole earth.

Seen by broad daylight on the homeward voyage the Westman Isles remained hardly less striking, though their livid cliffs had now turned to tawny and their steep gables of grass to the vividest of acid greens. As in space, so in time, they stand on the threshold of the Icelandic world, linked with the memory of the two earliest settlers, Hjorlief and Ingolf. Hjorlief's Irish thralls ("Westmen"), being forced to drag his plough, rebelled and killed their master, then took refuge here, where Ingolf, hearing of his comrade's death, pursued and hunted them down. Thence the name of "Westman Isles". A man-hunt no less grim took place early in the seventeenth century, when the whole population was massacred or carried off to slavery by corsairs from far-off Algiers.

Ten hours from the Westman Islands, after rounding Cape Reykjanes (which crawls down in its black crumpled skin of lava, like some vast prehistoric lizard, to shelter in the sea, with no sign of life amid its wilderness but a portly white lighthouse), there comes in sight the place of Ingolf's own landtake; where the high-seat pillars from his hall, flung overboard to give him magic guidance, drifted ashore on the site of the future capital. A universal grey is the first impression of Reykjavik—grey clouds trailing along grey, whale-backed fells behind a grey-walled town of Presbyterian primness. But the primness is only a first impression. The silks and powders of Paris walk even these Arctic streets; even here two cinemas exhibit, with nonchalant cosmo-

politanism, pictures of Egypt or China, talked in American, with captions in Danish. As the Heavens for Sigurd the Priest, so the earth for us grows "small as a calfskin"; and not always more intelligent.

This strange mingle of ancient and modern, of sophistication and simplicity, recurs at every step throughout Iceland. In the very act of descending the gangway, the traveller finds himself face to face on the quay with great stacks of bottles in boxes, proudly inscribed "Egil Skallagrimsson"; poorly as the hero of that violent Saga would have thought of a name writ in mineral-water, or of "the bubble, Reputation" compressed in gassy lemonade. Yet the modern Icelandic still cleaves to the old names and the old system of patronymics. Surnames are too newfangled for him; and so the children of, say, Kiartan Olafsson are still called — Kiartansson or — Kiartansdottir. Reykjavik itself, with its mushroom growths of concrete and corrugated iron and not an ancient building in it, honours none the less faithfully the memory of old Ingolf with a modernistic statue, by Einar Jonsson, set up in its main square; and plans to central-heat itself in most up-to-date fashion by boring down to the springs below it boiling with the earth's primaeval heat. The same contrasts continue through the countryside. Along the fifty kilometres of road to Thingvellir, where by the great prehistoric lava-rift the first of Parliaments met a thousand years ago, whole processions of shining automobiles now stream out to a little inn that still christens itself by the heathen name of "Valhalla". Venture a little farther afield and you find the few roads dwindling to rocky bridle-tracks, along which heroic American cars pound and bump their

sometimes literally seasick passengers. In lonely corners of mist-hung glens, famous for some grapple of berserks nine centuries ago, to-day there suddenly rise out of the desolation, glaring mutual defiance in their red and green armour, the rival petrol-pumps of "Shell" and "B.P." Farms lost in labyrinths of green morass, almost unapproachable on foot or wheels or in any way but on horseback, are yet equipped with telephone and wireless. As we supped at the kindly table of Magnus Gudmundsson, the priest of Ólafsvík, of whom we had just claimed the wandering stranger's right of hospitality as in the days of Abraham, suddenly a voice cried out of the ether above our heads that a battle was raging in "Vinaborg" and one Dollfuss had just been murdered. Or again at gaunt Stóraholt on the neck of Iceland, as we waited in a bleak room, tired, wet, and wondering if there would be anything to eat, all at once the chill air began to vibrate consolingly with Haydn's *Surprise Symphony*. On the lifeless moorland between Hjarðarholt and Laugar, across which Kiartan Olafsson used to ride to woo Gudrun, suddenly in the distance a netted enclosure caught our eyes, with black shapes inside it, skipping and gibbering like imprisoned hobgoblins—Icelandic and silver foxes being scientifically bred for their fur.

In this strange partnership of old and new the past may be doomed gradually to lose ground; but it maintains a tough resistance. The picturesque wood-and-turf farmhouses of other days, looking as if they had grown green fur to withstand the northern winter, have indeed yielded, almost everywhere, to cement and corrugated iron; but every farmhand still knows his Sagas, as few English labourers would dream of knowing the history

of their neighbourhood. At Gunnar's Lithend, when we asked the way to the hero's grave, a daughter of the farm who had just travelled out in the same car from Reykjavik, made nothing of scaling a steep hillside for ten minutes, in her town clothes and shoes, to show us that green and lonely barrow. Gunnar still mattered. And each Sunday, though most of the churches are new-built of tin, the priest himself arrives in black cassock and white starched ruff, like a Reformation portrait come to life; though even here modernity reasserts itself and the whole costume is incongruously crowned by a bowler-hat.

Again, though the capital has now swallowed half of the scanty hundred thousand that inhabit this country larger than Ireland, most of the remainder still live scattered about the wilderness in the same self-reliant isolation as their forefathers—not huddled in villages like the modern Sicilians, for example, who spend a large part of their lives drowsing on donkey-back between the hilltops they inhabit and the fields they till; they imitate instead the Cyclopes of Homer's Sicily, dwelling each by his lonely hearth and not meddling one with another. In consequence they remain, not town-minded like most of modern Europe, yet in touch by books and wireless with the world; not richly blessed with either goods or sunlight, yet tall and healthy in spite of it. The old violence is gone; but they still keep the calm, the restraint, the reticence of the Sagas, and their force of hidden feeling. It was fascinating to watch the country-folk dancing on Sunday evening at Thingvellir. The young women, as usual now outside the capital, wore trousers or plus-fours (regardless of the fate of Aud in the *Laxdaela Saga*, who in accordance with old Icelandic

law was divorced for donning man's breeches). Their faces were as impassive as masks; yet they danced like a cavalry charge, to the strains of a concertina played with such vehemence that it seemed bound to burst. With equal calm various small children wandered about the hall in the midst of this *mêlée*, colliding with couple after couple; yet they drew from the dancers not a word, not a flicker, of irritation—the intruders were just gently pushed aside. And each time the musician's muscles gave out, it was with judicial solemnity that the partners bowed to each other, as they took their seats again.

It proved the same everywhere. No country on earth can produce less fuss per square mile. At first this phlegm can be a little disconcerting. As evening slowly descends on black mountain and green bog and the deserts of the Iceland sky grow yet more hauntingly desolate in the grey half-light overhead, you turn to some homestead that has looked likely on the map, to beg for shelter. The door opens; cold eyes measure you up and down; you may even be questioned on the doorstep, with an icy wind searching your wet clothes. What are you doing?—Walking to see the Sagasteads! “How improbable!” say those stolid eyes. Even when the hoped-for nod of assent has been curtly given, you may still be left sitting in an empty, fireless room, with no sign of bed or board. And yet, while your spirits slowly sink to the zero of your feet, out of sight your supper is being prepared, your bed made; and before you drop thankfully into it, the stiff aloofness will have thawed and you will confess once more that there could be no race kindlier nor more hospitable.

This same imperturbability of the far North produces a leisurely indifference to time and punctuality worthy

of the Orient. Horses promised at nine will be nowhere in sight at eleven. A public 'bus with a long day's journey before it will indulgently wait a good half-hour at the gate of some intending passenger who has only just risen from his bed, though the hour of departure is long past; the offender finishes his breakfast, packs, kisses his wife, and at last descends his door-steps without any sign of embarrassment on his part, or of impatience from his fellow-travellers; at most, one of them will have tooted the horn at intervals in mild expostulation.

Even comfort is not thought to be worth much trouble. More ground could be reclaimed, more trees and flowers grown. The farm of Mulakot by Lithend, which has a flower-garden and even strawberries that ripen in August, together with a little grove of trees bearing, like strange fruit, coloured electric lamps lighted from the neighbouring torrent, remains a rare example of what might be done. But why bother? Even mental exertion about such things is troublesome. Instead of sandwiches we found ourselves given single pieces of bread-and-butter, each protected by a covering of transparent paper; which, when removed, naturally secured for itself the lion's share of the butter. We tried to explain that the pieces of bread-and-butter would be far happier face to face. We found our wish carried out—but with *two* pieces of paper inserted between! Even the native flies are so nonchalant that they have to be killed on one's face. They will not budge for mere gestures. An Icelandic fly is not so cowardly. It dies where it sits.

In the same way the old practical, unmythical attitude to religion still persists. The Icelandic pastor, so venerably

antique in his Sunday attire, becomes on Monday morning a healthy farmer in mufti, working vigorously on his land, which is often the most prosperous in the neighbourhood. Perhaps—last vestige of his Sabbath glory—you may see a black bowler-hat bobbing among the yellow haycocks. His wireless aerial is attached, without any fear of fire from heaven, to the tin tower of his little church. On his shelves lie a few religious works, cheek by jowl with the inevitable pagan Sagas. Except for one sad ascetic, all the priests we saw—and we learnt by experience to make, if possible, for the nearest parsonage at nightfall—seemed as happy and busy as they were kindly. “Are you not lonely, though?”—“Ah, no, we have the wireless, you see—and the telephone—and once a year we go to Reykjavik!”

But the old imaginativeness is also alive. One day the flashy bubblings of modern fiction may oust the Sagas—but as yet, in the country, there seemed no danger of it. True, this knowledge of the past was not always perfect. “Ah,” said an Iclander, when our Irish fellow-passenger revealed her nationality, “then we are kin—all Icelanders, you know, are descended from the Irish monks that settled here.” (Irish monks did by some miracle reach Iceland in their open boats, even before the Norsemen; but withdrew again before the heathen new-comers. However, the remark may have been more Voltairean and less simple than it looked.)

Typical was our visit to Bergthórshvöll, the most famous Sagastead in Iceland, once the scene of Njál’s burning, now a priest’s house. After a circuitous and bumpy journey across the flat pastures of the Austur Landeyjar, our car jolted to rest on the opposite river-

bank half a mile from the house. The ponies that should have met us were of course nowhere to be seen; after shouting in vain, we waded the stony ford barefoot, just in time to meet them jogging comfortably out of the gate of the homestead. But nothing mattered in the perfect peace of an evening that was beginning to smooth with its levellight the great green flats beside the sea and, beyond, like miraculous blue icebergs, the crags of the Westman Isles; deepening the distant azure of the great semi-circular ring of mountains to the north—Skálafell, Ingólfsfjall, Kálfstindar, Hekla, and Three-Corner (beneath which the Burners trysted for their enterprise); and turning soft grey the mists that quilted the long eastward snowfield of the Eyjafjallajökull. In the bright-green homestead, below the knoll that gave the spot its name, they were making the hay as in the days of Njál, a thousand years ago; and an old carle, bald, brown-bearded, and blue-eyed, dropped his rake to show us the hollow where the Burners hid; the way that Kari, the one survivor and destined avenger, fled screened by the smoke; the place where he quenched his burning clothes. And when we went indoors, past a bow hanging on the wall, to the hospitality of cakes and milk, he began reading out to us with eager excitement parts of the sacred tale.

It is, indeed, as if the land itself were faithful to its dead; still unspoiled and unchanged from what it was to their eyes. The same hot springs steam for ever in the hollows of the hills; the same columns of colder vapour hang above the giant waterfalls that shake the gorges with the earthquake of their onrush from the wilderness to the sea—Goðafoss and Dettifoss, Brúarfoss with its ice-blue

waters, Gullfoss which the sun of afternoon makes glorious with the golden colour of its name. Still, as for centuries, the same soft-eyed, courageous, uncomplaining little horses carry their heavy masters all day long, without more than a few mouthfuls of rare grass; toiling up the jagged lava-track, threading with dainty caution the green treachery of the morass, groping and stumbling through the roar of glacier-torrents whose muddy-grey welter hides so many false footholds and deadly holes. Still the great plover of the moorland wheels and circles hoarsely barking about the wayfarer, inquisitive as if it had never seen shape of man before; along the desolate beaches parties of brown cider-ducks with all their downy offspring rise before the intruder from their nests of brown seaweed and toddle in sedate family-procession to the sea; grotesque puffins, red in face and foot, skim the wave-crests, looking like flying moles in muzzles; two and two the wild swans, in their white and lonely dignity, sail slowly across sea-firth or mountain-tarn; and the sea-eagle swoops hatefully down-wind, like a great brown bomber, screaming at the rider who dares approach its nest on that grey battlefield of stones, into which Markfleet has turned and is still turning the meadows of Lithend.

This sense of a sad and changeless eternity presses more insistently than ever on the belated wanderer under the white summer-night which hangs in heaven, for ever about to fall, yet never falling, as hour by hour the slow after-glow of the sunset steals along the Arctic horizon to become imperceptibly the first light of dawn. But at all times of the day the Iceland sky can be as dreamily magical as that of Atlantic Ireland, with its

softly shifting pageantry of blue fissures and white peaks of cumulus, dappled with inlets of dove-grey.

Only one ancient feature of the land is deeply changed. The woodland trees are gone. Only a few lonely survivors still cling here and there to some glacier-guarded hollow of the mountains, like Thorsmjörk below Eyjafell, or to some river islet unapproachable by man; scattered clumps of degenerate dwarf-birch lurk among the moors; and in the north, between Akureyri and Mývatn an actual birch-wood, twenty to twenty-five feet high, still recalls the forests of the Saga-folk and provides their posterity with a marvel of nature so extraordinary that tourist-cars stop twenty minutes to do it justice.

To see the Saga-sites of the west and north, after those of the south-west such as Thingvellir, Lithend, Bergthórshvoll, and to make that first-hand acquaintance with a country that can best be gained by footing it (though walkers are so rare in Iceland that ponies used to shy at us), we set out a second time from Reykjavik.

July 23. Left at 8 in car crammed with 14. By the coast-road round the flank of Esja down to Whalefirth, the scene of the *Holm-dwellers' Saga*. Geirshólmi, their stronghold, turned out to be a tiny pillar of rock rising sheer from the firth and looking as if its top could hardly accommodate a dozen sheep. Yet there the outlaws held out for years, harrying the coast-farmers and, by agreed custom, pitching over their precipice into the sea any member of the band who was so effeminate as to fall ill for more than three days. The "road" for the twenty miles up one side of the firth and down the other was such an indescribable chaos of quags and boulders, that much of it could not be covered at more than four miles an hour and some of the seasick passengers would hardly have resisted being pitched into the sea themselves—as at moments

seemed not unlikely to occur. Got out at Ferjukot to walk to Borg. A senile old man at the farm allowed us to take a short-cut marked on the map, which led into an impassable arm of the sea. Tried in vain to ford it in three places and floundered for three-quarters of an hour through a swamp back to the road. After two hours of dullish highway had a lift from a lorry, charmingly decked with dwarf-birch branches. Found the legendary grave of Kiartan Olafsson in the churchyard of Borg—an immensely long green mound lying north and south; not east and west like the other graves. The stone that once covered it (though said to have been much later in date) had vanished, they told us, to the Museum at Reykjavik. Here at Borg Kiartan set sail for Norway, leaving Gudrun; here he landed three years later to find she had married Bodli, his best friend; here he was buried after she had goaded that friend to kill him. We looked north towards the far-off, cloud-ridden peaks of Snaefellsnes, behind which Gudrun herself lies buried under Holyfell. They told us that the one house beside the church still stood on the site where in the tenth century Kiartan's mother's father, Egil Skallagrimsson, made his home. Behind it an outcrop of naturally castellated rock had clearly given rise to the name of "Borg". A heavy grey cloud-bank piled itself threateningly above the black volcanic slopes of the Hafnarfjall above the estuary, as we walked down to the peninsula of Borgarnes, a little ramshackle port with petrol-pumps and stacks of coal and a litter of decaying sheep's horns. The inn at least proved better than it looked.

July 24. Found, after some difficulty, a car going to Stykkishólmur on Snaefellsnes. The driver rather timid; whereas most of his kind are imperturbably competent. Fortunately the road was unusually easy, except for narrow bridges with curved approaches where we nearly jammed. Beyond Fagraskógarfjall, a haunt of Grettir's in his outlawry, the crater of Eldborg rose from the wild lava of the Eldborg-arhraun, looking like a slice of lunar landscape. Got out beyond the farm of Bakkatunga and set out to walk along Snaefellsnes. It was strangely lonesome in the evening light, with the mists slowly lifting and uncoiling from

Snaefell itself, thirty miles ahead. At first we could not believe its rounded dome of snow was not itself a cupola of silver cloud. To our right the slow vapours curled and writhed about the volcanic peaks that make the black spine of Snaefellsnes. After three hours, at 8, reached the parsonage of Stadastrur. The door was opened by the parson in his shirt-sleeves, as astonished as an Icelander is capable of ever being. He asked us in; but it was terribly cold sitting in a fireless room for an hour and a half, just after fording a stream. At last, milk and *skyr* (solidified sour milk); hunger drove us brazenly to ask for more. Tolerable night, though the bed was narrow as a coffin; followed by a better breakfast, of coffee and biscuits. P. gave the priest's wan but charming wife hints for pruning the still more wan little roses she was trying to grow in a flower-pot by the window—an Ibsen-like symbol of that sad, though kindly, household.

July 25. A morning of real sun. Heavy going through alternate sand and bog along the shore. But the light was incredibly lovely, glinting in front on the snowfields of Snaefell, as on a swan's soft breast; and, on our left, shining right through the glassy-green translucency of the breaking waves, while a land-wind from the north whipped from their arched and shining necks white manes of spray. Strange how it recalled, despite all differences, another day of sunlit surf from the south, on the beach of Sicilian Selinunte with its broken marble columns white as the foam of that African sea. There were ruins here too, just like white column-drums, scattered along the shore; but these were vertebrae from the dorsal columns of dead whales. Lunch under the lee of an immense castaway buoy. Endless streams to ford by Ölkelda, where the track lost heart and gave up the ghost. Yet they say cars reach Ólafsvík! Good view of the pass that Bjorn used, crossing Snaefell to make love to Thurid, Snorri the Priest's sister, at Fródá, until he nearly perished in the blizzard her jealous husband got a witch to raise; finally Snorri drove him overseas, where years afterwards shipwrecked wanderers from Iceland found him grown a man of mark among an unknown race beyond the Atlantic and brought from him a last message to his old love in the north.

Climbed to the road towards the nearer pass of Löngubrekur, and then up through fine rain and dense cloud over the *col*. Very tired, after eleven hours on the way, when we reached the house of Magnus Gudmundsson, the priest of Ólafsvík—a village pleasant enough to the eye from a distance, with its houses trailing along the shore between mountain and sea, as if in pursuit of the little tin church at its far end, which seems leading the rest on a Pied-Piper's pilgrimage out into the deep; but less pleasant to the nose at close quarters, thanks to its drying fish.

July 26. Turned back eastwards, revived by a much more European night's entertainment; past the farm of Fródá, where once the dead drove the living from their own hall-fire. For each night the ghosts of the buried sat on one side of it and flung the mould from their winding-sheets at the ghosts of the drowned opposite; who retaliated by shaking back at them from their sodden clothes the salt drippings of the sea. Then by the neighbouring farms of Holt and Máfahlíð, a mile apart, where lived the two rival witches of the *Ere-dwellers' Saga*; until she of Máfahlíð got her enemy stoned to death, with a bag pulled over her head. Very peaceful the homesteads looked now; the only note of discord came from the clouds of gulls that wheeled above our heads, screaming shrill protest at our invasion of their sandy solitudes. On Búlandshöfði P.'s knee gave out. Turned back to Máfahlíð for horses. August Olafsson was making his hay; but proved ready to forsake it for us. He led us in to wait while he caught his ponies somewhere up the fell. A captured falcon drooped, looking very sorry for itself, in his window; and his wife, all courtesy, brought us coffee and little cakes. After an interminable delay, the horses appeared and we started off round Búlandshöfði, a steep headland ill-reputed for its narrow track across a cliff-face high above the sea. William Morris records having nightmares about it beforehand; and would only cross on foot. But it proved a very mild affair; though the sight of the Arctic breakers showing their white fangs far below brought back the memory of the two thralls of Máfahlíð in the Saga, who pitched themselves clean over here in panic-stricken flight from a local battle. Then on,

past Kirkjufell, most fantastic of mountains, so thin as to suggest a notched oblong dish stood on edge; round the shore of Grundarfjörður; and so by 8, with the ponies venting their exuberance at arrival in a last mad gallop, to the parsonage of Setberg, surrounded by a host of little hay-cocks, each covered with its little waistcoat of whitish tarpaulin. Marvellous luxury—two beds and a *bath*! The same unfailing hospitality; and a sunset of unearthly beauty beyond Krossnes.

July 26. P.'s leg too bad to walk; I almost too sore to ride. (Icelandic ponies do not expect the rider to rise in the saddle, but merely to bump, when the ground does allow them to trot at all; to the novice, after a day or two, the results are excruciating.) The priest found us horses. Over the Troll's Pass to the Berserks' Lava—an unbelievable desolation of jagged black slag and mountains like cinder-heaps, looking as if it had all cooled yesterday. Hereabouts two Swedish berserks somehow made a road through the lava, to win for one of them the hand of Asdis, daughter of Viga-styr, who durst not refuse them point-blank; when they had to his dismay performed their part of the bargain, by counsel of Snorri the Priest he offered them a hot bath in his new bath-house, barred the door, and so boiled them alive. The "ruins" of the said bath-house a farmer pointed out to us. So to Holyfell, the sacred crag that shadows Snorri's home and Gudrun's grave—a green mound, outside the churchyard, and lying north and south like her lover's supposed resting-place at Borg. This, however, is said to be genuinely hers. It was bright with yellow meadow-flowers and blue wild forget-me-nots. Came very stiff and tired to Stykkishólmur, a little port that even boasts an inn.

July 27. Found motor-boat to take us up Hvammsfjörður to the mouth of Laxárdalur. Lovely at first, with bright sun, and islets swimming round in all directions, sometimes with a lonely white farm aboard, and puffins whisking flurriedly across the wave-tops, and the great wall of the Snaefellsnes mountains to the south. But beyond Skorravík it clouded and wind and sea got up; never felt nearer drowning, with a very unconvincing old man at the tiller and two shivering apprentices. Ashore at last at Búðardalur, numb and

drenched; but with great expectations of bed and board at Hjardarholt, once Kiartan's home, now a farm that takes guests. But we found the master away in Reykjavik and were ruthlessly turned from his door by a churlish young lout of a neighbour, to straggle for an hour across a bog to the poorest farm we have yet been in. Bare, but surprisingly large room, considering what a turf hut the place had looked from outside; horrible supper of red grout and of mutton that tasted so rankly of sheep as to butt one completely over. But clean beds, a kindly good-night smile from the old woman (the young one had been icily aloof), and another amazing sunset to go to bed by—a great carnation splash of blood across black cloud, high over Gudrun's home in Saelingsdale.

July 28. After coffee (not bad, though as usual done to death with chicory) turned our backs on Laxárdalur—a gentle valley, like Yorkshire—to cross a dreary moor in the face of north-east wind and rain. Headed for Laugar, where Gudrun was born, and Saelingsdalstunga, where she lived with Bodli and where Snorri the Priest died; as at Thermopylæ, a boiling spring still marks unchangeably the scene of human passions long since cold. Now it feeds a lonely concrete swimming-bath; a cavalcade of young girls rode past on their way to bathe in it. We turned north up Svinadalur, narrow, green and lonely, where a boulder called the Kjartanssteinn records the supposed scene of his slaying; and over the pass to Bessatunga, the home of sturdy old Bersi who carried off for a while Cormac's Steingerd. The whole glen, as we came down, was hung with steamy vapours like a great bath. No parsonage, to our dismay, by the church of Stadarhólskirkja. But some passing riders directed us to the large farm of Stóraholt, where after a chilly reception we were surprised with the best supper for days.

Such are a few typical Icelandic travel-notes; there is no need to pursue them further—across the duck's neck of Iceland to the north coast; then along to the Akureyri road at Mel on Midfirth, Cormac the Poet's

home. Like that dreamy lover, the valley itself has a strange softness for this still more distant north; yet follow it a few miles up to Bjarg, the birthplace of Grettir, and it becomes savage again, with desolate moorlands stretching away towards the snows of Eiríksjökull, lost in the central desert. From Mel cars bump by way of Blönduós to Akureyri, the second town in Iceland; and beyond it to Mývatn, "Midge-water", a volcano-girdled lake where the tormented traveller may fortify himself by recalling those lines of Spenser as lovely as its landscape—

As when a swarme of Gnats at eventide
Out of the fennes of Allan doe arise,
Their murmuring small trumpets sounden wide,
Whiles in the aire their clustering army flies.

But a veil would be better.

From Akureyri it is simple to take the coast-voyage back to Reykjavik past the north-western promontories of Iceland, where for long years Gisli the Outlaw struggled in hunted loneliness, with the help of his wife Aud, truest of women; and so from Reykjavik home.

Iceland is faithful to the memory of its dead; and, in turn, its own memory roots itself deeper and deeper in the minds of those who have once been there, long after their vessel has rounded Spurn Head and fallen into its place in that long procession of ships from every point of the North Sea heading up the great highway of the Humber. The myriad dance of the white bog-cotton across those boundless wastes of green; the black fangs of basalt streaked with snow, that ring the inner desert; the majestic aloofness of those undarkening skies; the uneffusive kindness of a self-reliant race—at sudden

moments, amid the fugitive bustle of civilized life, the thought of their quiet dignity floods back into the mind.

And yet—it is wiser not to claim too much—though the memories of Iceland return, they do not drag at the heart with the home-sickness that the South can inspire. The Mediterranean—Provence, Italy, Greece—these have their sun to throw into the scale. It is a formidable counterweight. The Iceland-sun in summer hardly sets; but for days it may be hardly seen, blotted out behind endless armadas of grey vapour. Those gigantic waterfalls, though largely glacier-fed, make credible the assertion that it rains on three hundred days in the year. And from this lack of sun may come in part the lack of certain qualities in the life and early literature of Iceland—of gaiety, grace, lightness of touch. The Sagas can be great tragedy; but except in the *Tale of the Banded Men* their comic laughter is rare and grim. And though the women of Iceland are fond enough of finery, whether it be the old embroidered peasant-dress or the latest imitations of the Rue de la Paix (just as Saga-characters are often recorded to have been “showy men”), apart from this there are few signs of any great feeling for visual beauty or art. In this cloudy Cimmeria the very butterflies are grey.

Sense the Icelander has in plenty; but, it would seem, a more limited sensibility. There exists some respectable modern sculpture; but it is her literature that has won Iceland distinction; and that literature contains no Ronsard, no La Fontaine. Thor has left his name stamped on iron glen and jökull; troll and giant have haunted these wildernesses; but how far away seems, for

instance, the happy grace of Plato's Arcadia, as embodied in one of the most perfect of all Greek epigrams!—

Hush, O wooded hill of the Dryads! Hush your leaping
Down from the rock, O fountains! Hush, myriad-
bleating ewes!

For along his oaten pipe now Pan himself is sweeping
His supple lip to waken the sweet cry of the Muse;
And with feet untired for dancing about him gathered
gleam,
The Dryads from the forest, the Naiads from the stream.

There dwell trolls, not Dryads, in Iceland. Yet grace like theirs, so typical of Hellas, is one of the things that life can least afford to lose. For the Graces are goddesses of little things and of common days; like the poor, they can always be with us; and yet they are not poor. To many a riddle of the Sphinx the wisest answer is a smile; many a Gordian knot is best severed with a laugh. Greece and France have discovered that; and it makes theirs a still stronger magic. Calypso and Circe are of the South. The cold blue enchantments of the Westman Isles linger in the memory; but they lack the fascination of the pine-woods of Aegina, or the white walls of the Cyclades. Apollo, said the old legend, visited the Hyperboreans; but the Mediterranean has remained his home.

Yet visit them he did. And the imagination is the poorer that does not follow him; whether or no it takes the body also in its train. In this factory-world, whose walls we are daily building higher and higher round us, we are in danger of feeling more and more like mice in some vast generating-station; of forgetting that men remain more remarkable than anything men have made.

It is becoming as easy now for humanity to feel cowed and crushed before this roar of massed machines and machine-like masses, as for Pascal to shrink before "the silence of the infinite spaces". The individual needs new armour against the world; new foundations for the Ivory Tower of his own thought, the one sure reality, among these vibrations of a million wheels. Yet that new armour can still be the old, reforged. It is the dead that must help us to keep life living—the grace of Mozart and Ronsard, the smile of Horace and Montaigne, the courage of Homer and Hardy. Yet there are hours when the future can look so bleak, that the comfort even of these grows cold; then is the moment to remember, as a last reserve, the spirit of the Sagas, with their sardonic fatalism that relied on, hoped for, trusted in nothing outside itself. There, like the Aurora of the Arctic winter against its darkened Heaven, neither bringing nor needing any promise of coming dawn, still flames the energy of Iceland—"the patience of the North".

EPILOGUE

In these pages it has been suggested that the fundamental quality of Romanticism is not mere anti-Classicism, nor mediaevalism, nor "aspiration", nor "wonder", nor any of the other things its various formulas suggest; but rather a liberation of the less conscious levels of the mind. Health, both in life and in literature, lies between excess of self-consciousness and excess of impulsiveness, between too much self-control and too little. The Romantic intoxication of the imagination suspends the over-rigid censorship exerted by our sense of what is fact and our sense of what is fitting. The first of these dominates the extreme Realist; both inhibit the extreme Classic; the Romantic escapes.

But it is not always into Paradise that he escapes. "Romanticism", said Goethe, "is disease." If Keats be disease, then let us have more of it. None the less Goethe has repeatedly proved right. Reality-principle and super-ego are not devices of the Devil: they are necessities of all civilized life. Again and again the Romantic who drinks too deep, who surrenders too much to the Unconscious, who becomes too completely a child once more, has fallen a victim to the neurotic maladies that beset the childish adult who cannot cope with life but falls between two ages. Then the "clouds of glory" have changed to the nightmares of ego-maniac perversion; to the love of sensation even in torture; to the pursuit of strange fruit even in the Garden of Proserpine, whose beauty is Death.

The advantage of the Freudian viewpoint is that it links together various characteristics of Romanticism,

some healthy and some morbid, that hitherto seemed arbitrary and disconnected. Why, after all, should the same movement have led from Sir Galahad to *Salome*, from the Lady of the Lake to *La Charogne*, from chivalry to sadistic tortures, from idealism to ordure? Freud, like all pioneers, may often have got hold of the wrong end of the stick: it is hard to doubt that the sticks are there. About our infancy, it seems, lies Caliban as well as Ariel; after all, though it so horrified our grandparents, we accept the truth of that for the human race as a whole. And so the Romantic, I suggest, wandering in the Woods of Dream, has often wandered too far; and got lost like the neurotic who takes refuge from reality among the phantoms that haunt the mouldered lodges of his childish years. Those symptoms in individuals have become familiar; they are strangely like those of Romantic decadence.

But one may be the better for wine as well as the worse for it. The century since the Romantic Revival produced work of creative worth in greater abundance than any before it. Its criticism, too, became far more sensitive; but whereas eighteenth-century critics wrote often admirable sense or, if not, at least lucid nonsense, Romantic critics like Coleridge and Hugo and Carlyle and Ruskin and Swinburne, with all their brilliance, have tended to lapse into a transcendental nonsense far more tiresome to the reader. These star-gazers fall so easily into wells; and it is seldom Truth that they find at the bottom.

To-day, in the literature of the Many, Romanticism still reigns supreme; even in the literature of the Few its baser and more drunken offshoots seem to me far from extinct, though it is now a critical fashion to pose as

"Classical" and scorn Romanticism, as if it were not just as possible to have too little of it as too much. "The first important thing about contemporary literature", writes a modern critic, "is that it is contemporary." Unfortunately, it is often the last also. Pater thought, not very convincingly, that all art aspired to the condition of music; now it is to aspire to the condition of journalism. So we progress.

This may seem merely a matter of taste. On such, I have urged, it is vain for critics to debate; the only *general* judgements criticism can even attempt, I think, consist in saying, not "This is good" (good for what?), or "This is beautiful" (beautiful for whom?), but simply "This is true:¹ that is not", or "This looks sane; and this, diseased". It would be a great pity to banish writers like Baudelaire, as Plato would unhesitatingly have done. It is a great loss not to have read them. But it does not seem to me intelligent to ignore that such writers *are* diseased (as a great deal of genius is not); to live too much on, and with, them; or to forget that there remain certain advantages in being sane rather than morbid, sound rather than sick. And my complaint against much modern criticism is that it does forget these things; that it cares nothing if a writer is squalid, or brutal, or grovelling, or imbecile, provided he is "interesting" and leaves a new taste, however brassy, in the mouth. Our age is full of budding Baudelaires dyeing their heads green; when there is little enough need, with most of them, for that.

But even in theoretical criticism, though one may try to find a few general truths, ultimately one is still speaking

¹ I am aware that this word has many meanings; that does not mean it has none; merely that one must not muddle them.

of and for oneself, one's own values, one's own view of life. Looking back it seems to me that my own limited experience, through the twenty-two years since I went from Cambridge to the War, has only hardened these convictions by the test of time. In that No Man's Land, where one sat waiting for annihilation in a shell-hole, with the shells and speeches of both sides shrieking overhead, it was not mystics, religious or literary, that could bring support, but poets like Homer and Morris and Housman. I doubt if there is much modern literature that would stand that test, even for those who cheer it loudest in their armchairs. It is not the only test; but it is a severe one. And if the fatuity of modern Europe lets loose a new deluge, it will still be above all to the romantic Classicism of Greece, the romantic Realism of Iceland and of Hardy, the gaily realistic Classicism of eighteenth-century France that I shall look for consolation. They may fail; but I know none nearer to the truth of things.

This view of the world may not appeal to many: but it may interest a few. One learns in time to value the letters of private readers far more than the professional praises of critics. These are at all events the last pages of criticism I expect to write for long; perhaps ever. (This sentence, at least, in the book some will approve.) Life is short; and the state of mind that creates, however inadequately, seems to me more and more preferable to the state of mind that criticizes. The second can be amusing and absorbing; but the first is far happier, and far more alive. In any case I have expressed my views on life and letters quite enough, for the present, if they are true; too much, if they are not.

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